

THE I CAN SCHOOL



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THE KING AND QUEEN SAT ON THEIR ROCKY THRONE AND WATCHED
THEIR SUBJECTS.

The I Can School

*By
Eva A.
Madden*

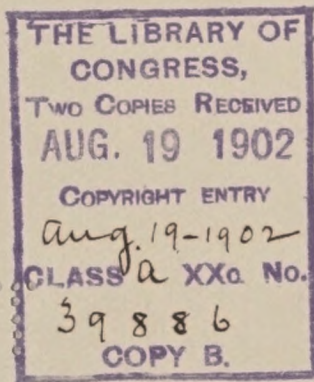


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TO MY
DEAR LITTLE PUPILS
OF
ANCHORAGE, KENTUCKY.

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THE I CAN SCHOOL.

CHAPTER I.

SEPTEMBER.

“WELL, Alice,” remarked Mr. Barton, looking up from the little blue-bound book known as the catalogue of the Fairview Academy, “I’m thinking that you had better escort our friend Miss Barton to-morrow morning to the path of Primer dalliance. Come here, Virginia.”

Virginia came close to his knee. She was six, and round-cheeked and chubby, with merry little dark eyes, and a nose which her papa said was trying to catch a glimpse of her eyebrows. She smiled up at her father and waited.

“Miss Barton,” — her papa, who was the kind of man who joked about everything, treated Virginia with the same respect he did her mamma’s grown-up young lady friends.

“— Miss Barton, how would you like to begin your education, and, incidentally, to break innumerable slates and lose dozens of pencils, at a cost of fifty dollars per annum? In short,

Miss Barton, how would you like to go to school?"

"I would like it very much," said Virginia, smiling in her slow baby way.

At first she thought only of the pleasure of a new experience. But after a moment's reflection the difficulties began to declare themselves.

"Papa —"

"Yes, Miss Barton."

"Won't fifty dollars be very heavy? Who will carry it?"

At first her papa laughed. Then he looked very solemn.

"The burden, Miss Barton, will fall upon the shoulders of your already heavily laden parent."

Virginia looked very troubled. She loved her papa very much. She remembered that her Aunt Lizzie had said that with only a little more to carry, her brother certainly would break down.

She remembered how heavy her bank had been when it had had fifty coppers in it. How much weightier fifty dollars would be she could only imagine.

"Will it break you down, papa?" she asked.

"It might, you know," said her papa, looking suddenly very weary.

"Then I won't go," said Virginia bravely.

"Oh, Edward!" cried Mrs. Barton, looking up from her book, "don't tease the child that way. Come here, Virginia."

Then she told the little girl how her papa

could write his name on a piece of paper from a little book, and make it mean exactly the same as fifty dollars.

"Then I can go!" said Virginia, all smiles; and slipping down from her mother's lap she went out to her playroom, and waked up all her children whose eyes were closed and who lay in a row on her bed. When they were well awake, she told them that their mamma must leave them for the purpose of improving her mind.

"You see, Lucretia Borgia," she said, taking up her oldest daughter, — a gentle-faced, blond-haired lady, who had been named by her grandfather, — "you can take your naps in the morning while your mamma is away. In the afternoon we will have school, and I can teach you your letters. It is a dreadful thing, Lucretia, to be ignorant. My papa says so."

On the following morning Mrs. Barton arrayed Virginia in a pretty pink gingham dress and a ruffled white apron. She curled her hair close to her head in loose neat curls. She made them by brushing the hair over her finger, and this gave them an old-fashioned look.

Then she gave Virginia a school-bag, in which were a slate, a book, and a pencil-box.

Her papa presented her with a small basket. In it were two biscuits with a filling of meat and nuts. There also was a slice of chocolate cake and a shining red apple.

"You are to eat them at recess," her mamma explained.

Virginia was delighted. "I wish it was recess now," she said.

Then she went into the playroom, and kissed her children good-bye.

"Be good, now," she said, "and when I come home I will teach all of you to read."

At a few minutes after eight Virginia found herself in a great room full of boys and girls. "'Most a thousand," she said to herself, but really there were not more than fifteen.

In front of the desks stood a pretty young lady, with light fluffy hair and a bright smile. She wore a white shirt-waist and a white duck skirt.

Virginia felt that it would be perfectly impossible not to love this lady. She looked as if she could never be cross with children.

Just above the lady's head, hanging on the wall, were two pictures, — one of a nice-looking old gentleman, with a fine ruffled shirt; the other of an equally handsome old lady, in a soft white dress, over which was folded a soft full kerchief.

Virginia wondered if they were the grandpa and grandma of the pretty lady. At last she mustered up her courage and inquired of a little boy standing near by.

He gave what Virginia thought was a very rude laugh. "Them's George Washington and Mis' Washington," he said. "They're the father and mother of Kentucky. They ain't nobody's gran'ma and gran'pa."

Virginia felt very ignorant. Here was problem number one. She wondered which of the little girls was Kentucky. She thought that perhaps it might be the little one with the turned-up nose and short hair. She was certain that such a nice-looking little girl would be sure to be worthy of such very desirable grandparents.

"Now, children."

The pretty lady tapped a bell.

"It is time to go."

"Go where?" wondered Virginia. Why, hadn't she just come, and now why was she to go somewhere else?

However, there was nothing to do but to file into line and follow the rest. At the door the little girl with the short hair hugged her hard and gave her a kiss.

"You cute thing!" she said.

Virginia slipped a soft hand into the equally soft hand of this affectionate and complimentary little girl. She felt at once that this was to be her best friend. Her papa had told her that little girls always had best friends at school.

"Is your name Kentucky?" she asked with sudden courage. Her new friend laughed, but not rudely as the boy had done.

"It's Billy," she said. "It's really Evelyn, but they call me Billy because I'm a tomboy. Kentucky's the State."

Here was another puzzle. What was a State?

Virginia determined that when she reached home she would ask her papa. Perhaps her mamma knew Kentucky. She felt that she would like very much indeed to know those old people. They had such nice rosy cheeks and such very white hair.

While all these thoughts had been going through Virginia's small brain the line had been moving along the hall. Now it stopped before a great door. The leader with puffing difficulty pushed it open, and Virginia found herself in an immense room filled with boys and girls much older than those in the charge of the pretty lady in the white waist. Billy led her to a seat on a bench so high that when at last she was upon it her fat little legs dangled until they felt hot and heavy.

On the other side of her sat the little boy who had told her about the father and mother of Kentucky. Across one end of the room ran a platform. Behind a desk at one end of it sat an old lady whose lips were very thin and close pressed together.

"She's 'most a hundred," whispered Billy.

Near the old lady sat a gentleman with a book in his hand.

At the organ at the far end of the platform was a young lady in a pink waist and black skirt.

The old lady tapped a bell.

At once the room was so still that Virginia felt as if all the hearts on earth had suddenly stopped beating.

Billy at that moment had the misfortune to drop her pocket-handkerchief.

She stooped to pick it up, and losing her balance fell to the floor with a loud, noisy bump. The old lady turned and looked at her very, very hard while she got up from the floor and climbed back to the bench. She continued to look until Billy, red to the roots of her short light hair, settled herself into motionless silence. When it was still again the old lady moved her chair toward the desk about four inches. She then opened a large book, the very largest Virginia had ever seen.

“Master Henry Armstrong.”

Virginia looked all round to see what “Master Henry Armstrong” was going to do. She wondered if he were the gentleman with the book. To her surprise, a very, very little boy, in a pretty sailor suit, answered, “Present,” in a small, scared voice.

Virginia had not the slightest idea what “Present” meant; but she answered it also when the stern old lady called, “Miss Virginia Lee Barton,” and Billy gave her a punch on one side, and the boy a poke on the other.

When every one had given voice to this mysterious word, the old lady closed the book, and re-moved her chair the same four inches.

Then came the gentleman’s turn.

“We will sing hymn No. 30,” he said.

This gave the pink lady a chance. She moved to the organ and began a tune. It

sounded like "Tell Aunt Rhody;" so Virginia sang, "The old gray goose is dead." She found, after a time, that she and the school were singing different words, so she stopped singing and listened.

The school's words were all about founts and tunes and something called an Ebenezer.

"What was that?" wondered Virginia. It puzzled her so, that she forgot everything until she saw some of the children kneeling, some bowing their heads. Virginia didn't know what to do; for Billy was standing up, and the little boy was down on his knees. While she was trying to decide upon her attitude in the matter, the man with the book began to pray. Virginia got down on her knees as quickly as she could, for her mamma had told her that it was very, very wicked not to kneel when you say your prayers. She wondered if Billy was wicked because she stood. Later on she asked her.

"I'm Presbyterian," said Billy; "we don't kneel."

Here was a fresh word — "Presbyterian," "Ebenezer," "Kentucky." Virginia felt that she must ask for a great deal of her papa's time that evening.

"Is Presbyterian naughty?" she asked Billy.

"No, it ain't!" said Billy, firing up. "It's church."

When Virginia found herself outside the big room, she wondered if she would have to go

there again. She hoped not; for she was so tired in the calves of her legs that she did not know how to walk straight; and she was so terribly afraid of that old lady, that she felt she would surely die if ever those eyes looked at her as they had looked at poor Billy. To her joy, the young lady in the white waist patted her on the cheek.

"You sweet little thing," she said, "I guess you're as tired as I am. Isn't it awful to have to be so still? And now, children, you may all walk around and look out the windows, and then we'll sing a lively song, and I'll tell you some stories, and we'll forget all about the chapel."

The rest of the day was very fine. At recess Virginia opened her basket. The boy who had told her about Kentucky looked so hard at its contents, that Virginia gave him one of her biscuits. She gave Billy half the cake, and a bite from the apple.

"Verginyah she's nice," said the boy to Henry, whom everyone called Harry. "She gimme a biscuit. She ain't mean like most girls."

Virginia at this felt that she had behaved in the most praiseworthy fashion. She determined on the morrow to give the boy a piece of cake, as well as a biscuit. She would ask her mamma to put in enough for two thereafter.

Before Virginia arrived home that day, she had discovered that the pretty lady's name was

Miss Ellison, that everybody called the boy Carter, and that Billy was the nicest little girl she had ever known, and would be willing at any time to come over and play mother, and make the acquaintance of Lucretia Borgia and the rest of her children.

The next day, Miss Ellison gave Virginia and the other children paper and boxes of paints.

"Now, children," she said, smiling very brightly, and looking right into their eyes, "every one of you must do the very, very best in the world. Remember, this is the 'I Can-School'; and everyone who says 'I can't' must tell us good-bye, and go in to the room with Miss Mason."

Virginia concluded from the faces of the children that Miss Mason must be the old lady who had looked so hard at Billy; and so she decided with the utmost quickness never even to whisper "I can't," even when she couldn't.

Taking her brush in hand she dabbed it in the water, and rubbed it all over the cake of green paint and began to work very hard.

"Gee! Look at Verginyah Barton's daub!" said the boy who had told her about Kentucky.

"Why, it isn't a daub at all," said Miss Ellison hastily. "It's a—a" — "Tree," said Virginia, smiling up into her face.

"Yes, a tree, a great, lovely, green, branchy tree," said Miss Ellison; and she patted Virginia on the head.

Virginia had felt very much discouraged;

but after the pretty lady knew her tree so easily she felt as if in time there might even be a chance of her becoming an artist like her Uncle John, who had painted portraits of all the family.

One day Miss Ellison called Virginia to her knee. In her hand was a book.

"Now, Virginia," she said, "we will learn to read."

At this Virginia smiled very happily. She was glad that now she was going to learn to read. She felt that it was necessary to save her from mortification as a mother, for Lucretia Borgia had begun to wonder why her education was so long in beginning.

Miss Ellison pointed to a picture.

"What is this, Virginia?" she asked cheerfully.

"It's a kitten-puss," said Virginia, with equal cheerfulness.

Miss Ellison looked less cheerful.

Virginia felt that she had not said what was expected of her. But how could she, when she had no idea of what was wanted?

Miss Ellison pointed to a second picture.

"And what is this?"

"A bow-wow."

Miss Ellison's cheerfulness entirely faded.

Again Virginia felt that she had not made the proper reply.

"And this?"

"A chicky," said Virginia.

Miss Ellison returned to picture No. 1. "This, Virginia," she said with firmness, "is a cat. Now see these? they are letters. C-A-T; that means cat also. Now say C-A-T, cat."

"C-A-T, cat," said the smiling Virginia.

"Now what is this?" inquired Miss Ellison, pointing to the picture.

"A kitty-puss," said Virginia.

"And this?" pointing to the word.

Virginia was dumb.

"C-A-T, cat," said Miss Ellison.

"C-A-T, cat," said Virginia.

"Now this?" pointing to the picture.

"Kitten-puss," said Virginia all smiles.

Miss Ellison paused for breath.

"She's stoopid," said Carter. But Harry acted nicer. He had not found the path of learning entirely roses himself; so looking very cute in his sailor suit, he tip-toed up to her side.

"Virginia," he said, "can't you say C-A-T, cat?" he asked, touching the letters with a fat little forefinger, and looking up into her face with the gravity of a little old man.

But no; Virginia could not see that "C-A-T, cat" had anything to do with that picture of a lovely black and white kitten-puss.

Everybody tried to help Miss Ellison teach Virginia to read. Even the man at the station, learning from Carter of her difficulty, tried to teach her the letters from the signs on the freight cars which stood on the track; but Vir-

ginia, who had no idea what anybody wanted of her, kept smiling and saying, "C-A-T, kitten-puss, H-E-N, chicky."

Miss Ellison went to the principal.

"Let her alone," he said, "she's taking things in. She will surprise you some day when you least expect it."

Mrs. Barton, however, took it seriously.

"Edward," she asked anxiously of her husband, "do you — can she — do you think Virginia's a dunce?"

Mr. Barton laughed.

"With two such brilliant parents?" he inquired. "Impossible, Alice, impossible!"

And that was all she could get him to say.

At last, when every one was in despair, the rector of Virginia's mamma's church heard of the trouble. He took his meals at the seminary with the boarding pupils, and so knew all about the school.

One day at recess time he called Virginia to the front porch. In his hand was a piece of the loveliest looking pie Virginia had ever seen.

"Virginia," said the rector, "would you like a piece of P-I-E, pie?"

"Yes, sir," said Virginia with amazing promptness.

"P-I-E, pie," said the rector.

"P-I-E, pie," said Virginia.

Then he showed her the letters in a book.

When she had said it ten times he gave her the pie; and she ate it all up except for a bite

which she gave Carter, who teased her out of it.

The next morning Virginia, looking very important, brought her Primer to Miss Ellison.

"P-I-E, pie! C-A-T, cat! D-O-G, dog! H-E-N, hen!" said Virginia, shooting out word after word, like a little pop-gun going off.

Then Miss Ellison hugged and kissed her; and Harry said, "That's fine, Virginia;" and her mother, in her relief that her daughter was not a dunce, gave her a doll which her papa named Catherine de' Medici.

Only Mr. Barton looked sad.

"Miss Barton," he said, "you have now become a terrible responsibility. You are no longer merely a little girl. You have become a lady of letters and accomplishments."

CHAPTER II.

OCTOBER.

IN a few weeks Virginia could read such important sentences as "Mamma, see baby," "Baby, see mamma;" and she liked school very much. Still, however, there were one or two things which troubled her. One was Lisa. She could not understand why no one played with Lisa and her brothers.

"They're Swiss," said Billy as if that settled matters. Virginia didn't know what Swiss meant, so she looked at Lisa and John and Carl very hard to try and find out; but all she saw was a quiet, poorly dressed little girl and two boys, whose hands were rough and red like those of Jim, the hired man at Virginia's home.

"We don't go with them," said Elsie Harrison, whose clothes were as fine as Lisa's were poor, and whose father owned Beechmont, a lovely place with a lake and conservatory.

Virginia felt very sorry for Lisa. She thought that it must be very stupid to be obliged always to go with two boys and never to be asked to play "mother" with the girls at their homes, or to be invited to the shows in

Elsie's third-story room, or to join in the pony rides in the afternoon. But as she did not know how to right matters, and as she was but six years old, she did what the other children did, — left Lisa and her brothers alone. It happened one morning that Miss Ellison gave Lisa the flag to hold.

Each morning the "I Can School" saluted the flag.

Lisa, proud of the honor, grasped the staff very fast in her hand, and stood erect before the class.

Tap went the bell.

Up rose the class.

"I give my hand, my head, my heart, to my country."

At that moment something shot through the air, struck the flag-staff, and landed white and round on the blackboard behind the astonished Miss Ellison.

It was Virginia's first acquaintance with that interesting missile of school warfare known as a paper wad.

It was also her first acquaintance with an indignant teacher.

"Children," — Miss Ellison's face was flushed, and her voice trembling with anger, — "who did that? This, you know, is a school where everybody acts square. If you do a thing, own up. Who threw that wad? Did you, Harry? You, Carter? You, Sal —"

Knock! Knock!

There was some one at the door. Billy ran and opened it, and in came a lady dressed in black. She held by the hand a little girl. Virginia thought her the prettiest little girl she had ever seen. Her eyes were very blue, her cheeks very red, and her curls a beautiful golden. She wore a white dress and black sash.

"Her papa's dead," whispered Billy, who had slipped into the desk beside Virginia. "Her papa's dead, and she's come to live at Mrs. Falconer's. She's her grandma." Virginia's bright little eyes filled with tears. It must be a dreadful thing to lose one's papa.

"Let's put our children in black," whispered Billy; and at such a cheerful suggestion Virginia began to smile at the prospect of a coming diversion. In the excitement of the arrival of a new pupil nothing more was said about the paper wad.

Next morning, however, lessons should have begun with the salute of the flag.

"Ain't we goin' to s'lute the flag?" asked Carter, struggling to bring about anything which should delay the moment of copy-books. Miss Ellison looked so grave that Virginia began to wonder who had been naughty.

"We will talk about that after recess," she said.

When the school came in from the playground, there was a sentence printed upon the blackboard.

Virginia looked very hard at its letters; but

as there was nothing about pie, cat, mamma, or baby, her face took on a pained smile of puzzled wonder.

Carter, with feet wide apart, hands behind his back, read it aloud:

"'Tis the schoolhouse stands by the flag."

Virginia smiled again; but she had no idea of what it meant. A schoolhouse standing by a flag?

"I'll tell you what it means," said Miss Ellison. "First, however, come out front."

Then she seated the "I Can School" on the benches around her chair, first a boy, then a girl.

"The boys," she said, "are layers in a nice big cake. The girls are the chocolate filling."

When Virginia told her papa about this arrangement, he informed her that when she grew up and taught school, she would find out why Miss Ellison thought it wise to put a little girl between two boys.

When the children were all seated, Miss Ellison told them a story. It began with our country when it was a great forest, full of Indians slaying deer, and scalping with tomahawks.

Then it told about how people came over the sea from England, and built houses, and made towns and cities, and of how it all belonged to England, who treated the people very badly, and made them pay money for things they did not get.

Then came a war, and Washington.

Virginia smiled when she heard this name. Her papa had told her all about the cherry-tree, and the war, and the neat copy-books.

Carter, on the contrary, did not look pleased. He hated copy-books, and knew that he could never have liked any boy who did like them.

Miss Ellison told of how America whipped England.

"Like we did Spain," said Carter, who knew every event of the late war.

Miss Ellison smiled. "Yes, Carter," she said.

Then she proceeded to tell the children of how when America was free, and a country all by itself, it needed a flag.

She went to the drawer of her desk, opened it, and brought out a little silk flag.

"What a funny flag, Miss Ellison!" said Elsie. "It's all sewed by hand. See every stripe!"

Miss Ellison let the children all hold the flag in their own hands. "Now I will tell you about it," she said.

"One day General Washington made up his mind that some one must make the flag. Near him in church sat a very handsome little lady named Betsy Ross. Her husband had died, her family had quarreled with her, so she was obliged to earn her living by sewing. She lived in a queer little house on Arch Street in Philadelphia, and there Washington went to call on her.

“ I have been in the very room, children, myself. It has queer tiles about the fireplace and a low ceiling and queer windows. The granddaughter of Mrs. Ross made this very flag I have shown you. She is a pretty lady too, and they tell you she looks like Mrs. Ross. She sits in Independence Hall, and will sell you these little flags, and tell you all about how Washington told her grandmother that he had heard of her neat sewing, and wanted her to make her country's flag.

“ He showed her a picture of what he wanted, — a flag of red, white, and blue, thirteen stars, and thirteen stripes.

“ A star for every State, a State for every star.”

Miss Ellison explained how, as the Union grew bigger and bigger, a star was added for each new State; and she begged each child to try to honor his or her country by loving and honoring its flag. She talked so earnestly that Virginia looked down in her lap. She felt so ashamed of the boy who had thrown the wad.

Then Miss Ellison told them of Philadelphia and Independence Hall where our country declared itself free, and of Mrs. Betsy Ross's house, where the flag is always unfurled, and of how brave men had followed that flag to battle, and given up their lives that the Stars and Stripes might still wave.

She was so much in earnest that she forgot the little girl in the white dress and black sash.

Suddenly she felt the touch of a soft little hand, and Virginia heard the new pupil telling of how her papa had died for the flag.

"In the Philippines, Miss Ellison. And I wouldn't stand anybody's not treating it right. Papa told me about Mrs. Betsy Ross, but what made me love it was that he died for it."

The room was very still.

Then Harry, with his little old man air, slipped up and touched the little girl's hand.

Miss Ellison put her arm around her, and drew her close.

"Frances," she said, "would you throw a wad at our flag?"

The child's eyes flashed, and Virginia thought she had never seen such red cheeks. They were redder than Lucretia Borgia's.

"No, I wouldn't!" the little girl said indignantly. "If any one did it I'd — I'd —"

"Children," said Miss Ellison, "you see how Frances feels. Her papa died for this very flag — the one somebody was willing to throw wads at. Frances, you are a soldier's little girl; you love the flag; will you help me to teach the 'I Can School' to love it?"

"Yes, Miss Ellison," said the little girl; and Miss Ellison looked so pleased that Virginia wished she was a soldier's daughter, only not to have her papa die. She was not patriot enough yet for that.

That afternoon Miss Ellison received a note. She read it to the school.

"I'm sorry that I threw the wad. I won't do it again."

There was a name signed, but Miss Ellison never told whose it was.

The next morning Miss Ellison taught the "I Can School" a piece. Frances brought it. Her mamma, she told Miss Ellison, had cut it from a paper.

This is the piece :

THE FLAG GOES BY. *

Hats off!

Along the street there comes
A blare of bugles, a ruffle of drums,
A flash of color beneath the sky.

Hats off!

The flag is passing by.

Blue and crimson and white it shines
Over the steel-tipped ordered lines.

Hats off!

The colors before us fly,
But more than the flag is passing by.

Hats off!

Along the street there comes
A blare of bugles, a ruffle of drums,
And loyal hearts are beating high.

Hats off!

The flag is passing by.

Virginia tried hard to learn it. At last she did.

* Copied from Primary Education. By H. H. Bennett.

One afternoon she said it to her mother, and in the evening to her father.

They were much pleased.

"Miss Barton," said her papa, "you are a child to gladden the heart of even the most exacting parent."

A few days later Virginia brought home a little flag painted by herself.

Her father studied it with becoming attention.

"Miss Barton," he said, "while there is yet a slight indecision in your lines, I am persuaded that you will yet hang a picture in the Salon."

"And we're going to drill," said Virginia grandly. "That's what Miss Ellison told us to-day. And Frances is Captain cause her papa was a real captain. He died, papa, for the flag, and they wrapped him up in it; and she wears a black sash, and all my children are in black too. And, papa, Jamie and I are to march in front. We are the smallest, and it's the Fairview Home Guard. Carter named it."

"Wonderful, Miss Barton, wonderful! And will you volunteer in case of the President needing more troops for the Philippines?"

"Oh, Edward, don't!" cried Mrs. Barton, who was putting Virginia's flag away in a precious box where she kept her first curls, and her baby cap and shoes, and the silver spoons Virginia's grandmother had given her on birthdays and at Christmas. "Don't tease the child. That is very nice, Virginia, and some

day mamma will come to school and see you practice."

"At Christmas," said Virginia. "We're going to have an exprobition, and wear red, white, and blue, and carry flags."

"Delightful," said Mr. Barton; "I'll certainly be there."

But Mrs. Barton looked a little sad. She, too, would be there; but first she would have to make the red, white, and blue for Virginia to march in.

CHAPTER III.

NOVEMBER.

A GREAT many things happened in November. For one thing, the "I Can School" wrote compositions. For another, all the children spent an afternoon with Frances.

One day Miss Ellison told the children that they must begin to think about Thanksgiving.

"I am begun," said Carter. "We're going to have turkey."

But it was not of turkeys that Miss Ellison wanted the "I Can School" to think. It was of some people whom she called Pilgrims. Virginia listened very hard, because, when she reached home, she would have to teach Lucretia and Catherine.

Miss Ellison told of the hard times these people had in trying to go to the church they believed to be right, and of how at last they sailed across the ocean in a ship called the Mayflower, and came to America.

Virginia felt very sorry for the Pilgrims when Miss Ellison told of their sufferings from cold and hunger, and from the savage ways of the Indians, and smiled when she heard of how at

last things grew better, and they made a feast, and gave thanks to God for His goodness in giving them liberty and a fine harvest.

The day of the feast they called Thanksgiving.

When Miss Ellison ended her talk, she had Jessie come out front and recite "The Breaking Waves Dashed High."

Virginia thought it a lovely piece, and made up her mind to learn it as soon as Miss Ellison would teach it to her.

"Now," said the teacher of the "I Can School," when Jessie had taken her seat, "we will write compositions."

Virginia did not know what compositions were; but she concluded that they could not be very pleasant things, for Carter began to grumble, and even Billy the cheerful looked depressed.

Miss Ellison laid a piece of paper on each desk, then a pencil, then a little picture. Some of the pictures were of turkeys, others of pumpkins, others of sad-looking people in long cloaks and queer hats.

"Them's Pilgrims," said Carter, surveying his, a grim Puritan of sour countenance, with scornful disfavor. "Miss Ellison, please'm don't make me take the old thing. I'd rather have a turkey. This Pilgrim's as cross as two sticks."

Miss Ellison laughed, and exchanged the Puritan for a gobbler, to Carter's instant relief.

"Now," she said, "every one of you may paste your picture on your paper. It will be

what we call an illustration. Then we will write 'Thanksgiving' on the very top line, then your name and the date on the second. I will write it on the board for the big ones, and print it for the little ones."

Everybody had to use ink, and poor Harry got black marks all over his chubby fingers.

"Never mind," said Miss Ellison, "it will wash off, and I don't like pencils."

It took two days for the "I Can School" to tell why it was thankful. First, it had all to be told on a rough piece of paper, and then copied on the paper with the picture.

Miss Ellison had to print Virginia's composition. Then Virginia copied it.

Here it is:

THANKSGIVING.
VIRGINIA BARTON, NOV. 27
I AM THANKFUL
FOR MY PAPA
AND MY MAMMA.

Here is Carter's:

I am thankful for the sun and rain.

I am thankful for the turkey.

I am thankful that I am a boy.

I am thankful that I am not a girl.

When all the compositions were finished, Miss Ellison pinned them on the walls and window

frames. Then the principal came in and looked at them, and patted Virginia on the head, and told her that she would soon be a famous writer.

On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving Day, Miss Ellison told the "I Can School" to remain at home until Monday.

"On your way from school to-day," said Miss Ellison with a smile, "I want every one of you to stop at the Post Office, and ask Miss Bayne if you have a letter."

Miss Bayne was the post-mistress. Virginia and Billy always went home together.

Billy had a lovely little sorrel pony named Dot. Dot was not really hers, but was lent her by Mr. Davis who owned a large stock-farm near Fairview. Billy knew that one day she must give Dot back, but while Dot was hers she loved her with all the warmth of a loyal animal-loving little heart. She told Virginia that she knew that Dot understood every word that was said to her; and Virginia, who *believed* every word that was said to *her*, regarded Dot as a pony of very superior mental endowments.

On this particular Wednesday the two little girls told Miss Ellison good-bye, and both mounted Dot.

When they reached the Post Office, Billy slipped down, and knocked on the door of the little building used as an office by Miss Bayne.

"Come in," called the post-mistress, surprised that any one should have to be invited into the

Post Office. She did not know that Billy did not think it safe to leave Virginia alone with Dot.

"Come in," called Miss Bayne again.

Billy opened the door, meaning to ask Miss Bayne to please hand her the mail, when, suddenly, in answer to this second invitation, Dot with Virginia on her back, walked right through the door, and before Billy could stop her, proceeded up to the window.

"No letters for you, ma'am," said Miss Bayne with a laugh.

"Is there a letter for me, Miss Alice?" asked Virginia, plucking up courage.

"And one for me?" cried Billy, who had gotten hold of Dot's bridle ready to lead her out.

Miss Bayne handed a letter to each little girl. They were small letters in envelopes about two inches square.

They did not open them until they reached home, because neither of them could read writing.

Mrs. Barton opened Virginia's very neatly with a little mother-of-pearl letter-opener.

This is what she read : —

DEAR VIRGINIA, — Grandma would like the "I Can School" to spend Friday afternoon at Clover Nook. Can you come at 3 o'clock? I hope you can, so does mamma.

Your little friend,

FRANCES McDOWELL.

When Virginia showed this letter to her father he looked very solemn.

"Misfortunes," he said, "follow fast upon each other's heels. Not content, Miss Barton, with being a lady of letters, you now become a lady of fashion."

Friday at last came, and Virginia found herself in the great parlors at Clover Nook. The children all looked so fine and so uncomfortable in their best clothes that it was very difficult to be friendly. Virginia, forgetting her own splendor in a white lace-and-silk party gown, stared in speechless wonder at Carter looking rebelliously dangerous in a ruffled shirt and suit of velvet.

"Tain't fine," he said in response to Miss Ellison's complimentary approval. "It's tight."

Mrs. Falconer, Frances's grandmother, was a very grand-looking old lady with such lovely white hair that Virginia immediately thought of Mrs. Washington.

She patted the children on their heads, and shook hands with Miss Ellison.

Virginia, standing by, heard her tell Miss Ellison of how she didn't think it good for Frances to be in the country without a thing to take her mind off her trouble.

"Children are good for anyone," she added, "so I've taken things into my own hands, and given this little party."

Presently the children forgot their good clothes, and the little boys were persuaded

to come out from the corner in which they had gathered in a group.

"Come with me, children," said Mrs. Falconer; and she led the way across the hall into two great rooms. "We got all these things in the Philippines," cried Frances; and she led the children to the tables on which were great albums of pictures. On the walls were daggers, and bows and arrows, and baskets and swords, and all sorts of queer embroideries. Virginia had never seen such a room. Then there were swords and gems, flags and standards.

She stood close to Mrs. McDowell, so she could hear all about the photographs. She wished Catherine and Lucretia had been invited. Of course she could tell them the stories, but it was too bad that they could not see the pictures. One was the photograph of a man in the queerest clothes dancing about on the hard-wood floor of a splendid big room.

"This is a man I called Two Step," said Mrs. McDowell. "He was a Philippino who polished the floor in the palace where our general lived. He used to tie gunny sacks on his feet, and dance what we call a Two Step until the wood shone like a mirror."

By and by she showed the children a queer Indian blanket on which were woven in squares long-legged birds running races with what were meant to be steam-engines.

"An Indian chief, one out west, gave it to

me," explained Mrs. McDowell; "he said that this long-legged bird is the Indian's idea of swiftness, the train is the white man's idea, and the race shows how the white man is beating the Indian."

When Virginia was tired of the pictures, Frances led her to a certain corner where she kept her own treasures. On the wall was the picture of a very sad-looking little boy with great soft eyes.

"It's the little King of Spain," explained Frances. "Papa found it in a palace in Cuba. He gave it to me because I wanted it."

Virginia did not know who the little King of Spain was, but it made her feel bad to see the sad face.

"He was whipped," said Carter, coming up. "We whipped him."

Virginia felt sorrier than ever. Once she, too, had had a whipping. She often gave them to Lucretia. No wonder the little king looked sad. When Mrs. McDowell left the room Mrs. Falconer showed the children a flag.

"It was in fourteen battles," she said. "They laid it across Captain McDowell when they brought him home."

"No wonder Frances loves the flag," said Miss Ellison, and she looked at the children. All this was very interesting, but Virginia began to wish for the party.

"I hope it'll be ice-cream," said Carter, "and they'll ask me to have it twice."

Before they had the party, however, Mrs. McDowell told the story of Monk, and showed his picture to the children.

Here is the story:

One day Frances and her mother went with some officers for a sail on the lake. They landed at a quiet town, and walked about the strange streets.

By and by a man approached with some monkeys, and they stopped to watch them at their tricks. Suddenly one of them sprang into Frances's arms. It pressed its ugly little face against her cheek, and clung to her like a child, and refused to go back to the man.

After some discussion Captain McDowell gave the Philippino some coins, and Frances kept Monk.

Monk soon became the most important member of the household. Every morning he would insist upon having his face washed and dried on a towel exactly as he saw the nurse do to Frances.

He refused his meals unless given a napkin; and then when he had finished, he would wipe his face and hands like a careful old man.

Whenever Monk looked very, very good, as if he were in Sunday school or church, Mrs. McDowell always knew that he had been up to mischief, and set out at once to discover the extent of damages.

Monk had to be left in the Philippines,

and all Frances had to keep alive his memory was the photograph which she showed again to Virginia.

"I wish papa and Lucretia could see it," said Virginia. "They love monkeys."

Just then Mrs. Falconer rose and said :

"Harry, will you escort Virginia to the dining-room, and Carter, will you take Evelyn?"

When they were all paired off, Miss Ellison struck up a march on the piano, and out they went.

"My!" said Billy.

"Ge-ee!" said Carter.

Virginia never saw anything so fine.

"It's Thanksgiving," said Frances, "so we have things Pilgrims liked."

In the center of the table was a lovely ship. It was made of spun candy, and was sailing on a sea of glass, surrounded by a border of lovely little pumpkins, "full of candy," Frances told Virginia. The ship was the Mayflower, and for passengers there were lovely little dolls dressed as Pilgrims.

Half way down the table were great pumpkins, real ones, scooped out and filled with chrysanthemums. At the end was the biggest pumpkin-pie Virginia had ever seen. At the other was a great big turkey. On the sides were big pumpkins filled with all sorts of favors and bon-bons.

The chandelier and room were decorated with ears of corn, flags, and ribbons. At each place

was a pretty card with the name of the little girl or boy who sat there painted on it. On the girls' cards were also painted little Pilgrim girls; on the boys', Indians with tomahawks.

Virginia never ate so much in her life. Neither did Carter. When the time for ices came they were little ships and pumpkins and tomahawks. Carter ate a fierce red Indian, and then was happy with Miles Standish in chocolate and vanilla.

"You're a cannibal, Carter," said Miss Ellison.

"I'm mighty full," said Carter. "This is a mighty nice party."

By and by Mrs. McDowell handed Lisa a knife, and told her to cut the pie. All the children stared. Why, how funny in Mrs. McDowell to choose Lisa!

"And when the pie was opened," said Mrs. McDowell as Lisa put in her knife.

Virginia nearly jumped out of her seat, for the lid of the pie came off, and there inside were not blackbirds, but a pretty little turkey for each child. They were made of candy, and looked brown and ready for eating.

Then Mrs. McDowell told the children that the Mayflower had reached Plymouth.

"The passengers must land," she said. Then she and Miss Ellison took the dolls from the boat. Each little girl received one. Some of them had to be gotten from a table which Miss

Ellison called England. The "Mayflower was so small a boat that it could carry only a few passengers," said Mrs. McDowell.

Instead of dolls the boys each received a little pumpkin filled with candy.

Then they all snapped bonbons, and put on fancy caps.

Virginia was Priscilla, so her cap said.

"Didn't we have a good time?" asked Billy as they put on their things to go home.

Elsie looked very scornful. "The idea of letting that Lisa do everything!" she said.

Virginia, too, had wondered at this.

Hadn't she been told that she was not to go with the Swiss?

"I wouldn't go with them like Frances does," said Elsie, her nose in the air. "Their father is a sort of hired man down at Mr. Davis's. They are not in our set. Frances can do as she pleases; but I, for one, don't propose to go with them," and she put her arm around Ida Stanley's waist, and drew her away to whisper something which Virginia did not hear.

When Virginia got into her carriage, there sat her mamma ready to hear everything, to admire the new doll, and to have her mouth water at the sight of the candy turkey.

On the way home they stopped at the station to wait for her father's train.

"It was lovely, papa," cried Virginia, as Mr. Barton stepped into the carriage. "I love the 'I Can School' this week best of all."

“Yes,” said Mr. Barton, smiling, “I hardly wonder that you do, Miss Barton. I remember myself, student that I was, that I used to think school was at its best when it was taking a holiday.”

CHAPTER IV.

DECEMBER.

DURING the month of December all sorts of delightful things happened in the "I Can School." In the first place it was necessary to practice for the Christmas entertainment, and this meant fun instead of lessons. Then one day Miss Ellison asked the children if they would like a Christmas-tree. They said that they would; so she invited them to come to her room in the afternoon, and string pop-corn, and make chains of tissue paper rings. Virginia thought it the finest Christmas she had ever known.

Sometimes when they were helping her in her room Miss Ellison would light her chafing-dish lamp, and make chocolate, and pass it round in cute little blue-and-white china cups. One afternoon Carter drank four cups, and Miss Ellison only laughed.

"If you wuz our mamma, Miss Ellison," he said, "we'd have enough to eat whenever we wanted it."

"You'd have indigestion," said Miss Ellison.

Two afternoons before the last day of school the children brought to Miss Ellison all the Christmas-tree ornaments they had at their home, and Lisa's brother John drove into the school-yard with the very biggest Christmas-tree even Miss Ellison had seen. Virginia was all excitement.

"Papa," she said, "I just love the 'I Can School' more than ever."

"I should imagine you do," said Mr. Barton. "In my day schools had more to do with lessons; and I did not love them more than ever, but decidedly less, Miss Barton, most decidedly less as time went on."

"But, Edward," put in Mrs. Barton, "the children do learn. Miss Ellison has different ways from any teacher I have ever seen; but did you see Virginia's last writing? Indeed, she is learning wonderfully."

"And so is Lucretia," said Virginia. "She is reading on page 15 in the Primer."

At last came the day before Christmas. By ten o'clock all the papas and mammas, and relations and friends, had gathered in the Gymnasium. Across one end of the great room was a white curtain trimmed with holly branches. In front of it was a little stage. The chairs for the audience were arranged so as to leave a great square of floor unoccupied.

At ten o'clock Miss Ellison appeared in the doorway. She waved her handkerchief. The principal's wife then began a march on the

piano. Then Frances appeared at the door, and entered, followed by the "I Can School" marching two by two. All the little girls wore dresses of white cheese cloth, with bands of red about the hem. The collars, belts, and cuffs were of red, and over full white waists they wore little bolero jackets of blue. On each head was a cap made of a flag. The little boys wore white duck suits with sashes, ties, and caps of red, white, and blue.

Captain Frances walked alone, carrying a handsome silk flag presented to the school by Virginia.

They marched, they wheeled, they formed squares, they divided and advanced under an archway of flags. They retreated, they made all manner of fancy figures, and in such perfect time that the fathers clapped their hands and said, "Hurrah for the Home Guard!" and the mothers touched each other on the shoulders, and smiled and whispered, "Isn't it cute?" "Isn't it lovely?"

When the Home Guard at last formed into a solid square, Frances, holding aloft the flag, stepped to the platform and the children saluted it.

Virginia had marched in front with Harry. They were exactly the same size, and looked very serious with an overwhelming sense of responsibility. When Virginia passed her papa he looked very solemn too.

"You see, Miss Barton," he explained that

evening at home, "your parent recognizes authority. At West Point where they train soldiers, when a man's on duty, even his parents have no right to speak to him. For your sake I controlled even my smiles."

After the drill, came an entertainment which Virginia declared was the nicest she had ever seen.

"It ought to be, goosie," said Carter; "you ain't never seen another." All the children recited little pieces, some in costume. Billy was a Jap; Carter was a Chineese; Virginia recited a little poem about Santa Claus; and Elsie was old Mother Goose.

Then came a little play. At the end of it the Christmas Fairy, who was Jessie in a lovely white dress trimmed in red ribbons and holly, waved a wand. The white curtain fell, and every one went "Oh! oh!" There was the very handsomest Christmas-tree the "I Can School" had ever seen. At the top was a lovely star, and from below it came garlands of rose-colored tinsel.

While the tree was being lighted the children sang a little song. Miss Ellison and the young lady in the pink waist, who was the music teacher, had taught it to them.

It was very pretty and began:

Once a little baby lay
Cradled in the fragrant hay,
Long ago on Christmas.

There was one thing which happened which Virginia never forgot.

All the children loved the rector, so Miss Ellison asked him if he would talk a little to the "I Can School" about Christmas.

The rector loved the children as much as the children did him, so he made his talk very short. Virginia did not understand all that he said; but she loved him, and so she listened with a smile on her round little face. First he told them of how much he had liked the entertainment.

"But best of all," he said, "was the drill." Here he looked right at Virginia, and she smiled more cheerfully than ever.

"I liked the drill, dear little 'I Can School,'" he said, "because it was almost perfect. I do not believe any children could drill better. But way back of that drilling I saw work, and obedience to you, Miss Ellison. And as I watched your little captain, so earnest, so zealous, I thought of two other captains. One was an old friend of mine. We were boys at school together. He was the father of your own captain, and he laid down his life for the flag which you have saluted to-day. I remember how he worked, how he obeyed, and never forgot to be true to his flag.

"Then I thought of the other Captain. He is the Captain under whose flag I fight. You didn't think that I am a soldier? Well, I am. Don't you see I wear a uniform? Are not my

clothes different from your papa's? Well, my Captain was once that little babe who lay in the hay on Christmas, the one you sang about. Now do you know whom I mean?

"Well, what I want to have you remember is that His flag flies ever before the Red, White, and Blue.

"His flag must be your guidon. Do you know what a guidon is? It is a flag which they carry at the head of every marching column. Its color for us is red, because our Captain is always victorious."

Then he told them of what they must do to be true to the guidon; and Virginia, listening, decided that nothing would ever make her forget a word the rector said, because he was so nice, and knew just how to talk to children. But this talk came before the tree was lighted. While the candles were burning, each child was given a box of candy from Miss Ellison. The boxes were lovely, all made of tissue paper, like great red, white, and blue snowballs resting in green leaves.

Then they received candy rings from Jessie, and lovely cornucopias of candy from Frances, and little Japanese paper sachets from Carrie.

As for Miss Ellison, she had a whole table of presents. Virginia brought her a vase. It was lovely, of dark brown with flowers on it. She picked it out herself; and her mamma said it was in very good taste, and that Miss Ellison

would be much pleased to have it. When she undid the paper she cried:

"Rockwood! O Virginia! To think of my having a piece!"

Virginia did not know why she said Rockwood; but she was sure Miss Ellison liked it, for she saw her showing it around to the teachers.

Frances came and kissed Virginia good-bye.

"Merry Christmas," she said, and then invited her to spend a day during the holidays at Clover Nook.

"I am going to have you and Billy and Lisa and John and Carl."

"And Elsie?" asked Virginia.

Frances shook her head.

"She isn't nice to Lisa," she said. "And mamma and grandma like Lisa. They say she is well brought up. Be sure to come, and bring Catherine and Lucretia."

It puzzled Virginia to know why Frances was so nice to Lisa. Elsie would have nothing to do with her.

Billy did not bother one way or the other.

"I like ponies, dogs, and boys," she said. "'Cept you, Virginia, girls are always fussin'. Boys fight you, but they don't stay mad like girls!"

Virginia felt very sorry that there was to be no "I Can School" for two weeks. She would miss Billy, and she loved Miss Ellison.

"Still, you know," said her father, "you can

study just the same. I will only be doing my duty as a parent to set you a copy each night. And mamma, you know, will gladly hear your lessons, and supply all kinds of interesting information about cats and dogs, hens and babies."

But Virginia did not fancy the advice.

"I s'pose," she said, "I might as well give Lucretia and Catherine holiday too. Poor little things," — trying to make her voice sound like Miss Ellison's, — "they, too, must be tired of hens and cats and dogs and mammas."

Early Christmas morning Virginia slipped out to the dining-room, and laid a little parcel on her father's plate. Then she placed one on her mother's. Then on her own she laid two very small ones.

"My! my! what is this?" asked Mr. Barton, when later they sat down to breakfast.

"A surprise," said Virginia solemnly. "And mamma's is too, and so is mine."

They all opened their parcels.

"And you did it, Virginia?" cried Mrs. Barton, the tears in her eyes. She held in her hand a little book made by tying leaves of paper together.

On the cover was painted a holly leaf. Around it was printed "A Merry Christmas."

Inside were specimens of Virginia's painting, drawing, number-work, and writing.

Mr. Barton's was like his wife's, only on the front page of his, Virginia had printed "To My

Dear Papa." On the front page of her mamma's was "To My Dear Mamma."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Barton were very much pleased.

"To think that the child has learned so much!" said Virginia's mamma.

"I must send mine to your grandmother Barton, Virginia," said her papa, who was so much impressed that he failed to joke. "May I?"

"But what have you, Miss Barton?" he inquired, seeing Virginia with two opened parcels also.

"A surprise from Catherine and Lucretia," she said. "Isn't it nice to think they have learned so much? I am very much pleased with my children."

"And they put them on your plate as you did ours?" inquired her father, inspecting the books, which were singularly like the work of their mother.

Virginia looked very much embarrassed. She could not say that they had, and yet she would rather not say that she had put them there herself. There is not much surprise in surprising yourself. Her mamma came to her rescue.

"What thoughtful children you have, my dear! I must look at their work, and see if they are also good pupils. And now," she said, "run and tell Nellie to get you dressed in your blue cloak and new bonnet; for we are a

little late, and must get to St. Luke's in time for the service."

At church Virginia saw Carter.

"Ain't you glad it's holiday?" he asked, as they walked home in front of their mammas.

"Yes," said Virginia very seriously. "School is nice, but no school is better."

CHAPTER V.

JANUARY.

ON the day following New Year Virginia asked her mother to please fix her some lunch.

"It's school to-day," she remarked to her papa.

"Poor Miss Ellison!" said Mr. Barton. "How much she must love you this morning!"

"She does," said Virginia confidently; "she'll be just as glad to see us."

"And the Lady Principal?" inquired Mr. Barton.

Virginia was not so certain.

She was still very much afraid of the Lady Principal, and tried to make herself as small as possible whenever she saw that august personage approaching.

"She's different," she said; "she don't understand little children, Billy says. Carter, he says she's mean."

"Don't talk that way about your teachers, Virginia," said her mamma, tucking a napkin over the lunch she was putting in the basket; "Miss Mason is an excellent lady. I admire her very much, and she is only severe when you

need it. Carter, I am sure, needs it quite often. And, Edward, don't joke with Virginia about her teachers. I want her to look up to them."

Mr. Barton surveyed the very small person of his daughter.

"Miss Barton," he said, "let me see you ever attempting to look down upon your educational advisers, and I shall speak to the principal, and have you severely disciplined."

"Oh, Edward, don't!" said Mrs. Barton; "do be serious. You joke about everything. How can I rear Virginia to have proper ideas of life when you make fun of everything I say?"

For once Mr. Barton had no answer to make. He kissed his wife instead, and taking Virginia by the hand said, "Ready, Miss Barton? Kiss mamma good-by then, and we'll be off to school."

January in the "I Can School" was destined to be a month of troubles. The children were very fidgety, and showed a tendency to be unruly.

All the candy of Christmas week, not to mention fruit-cake, mince-pies, nuts, and plum-pudding, had upset the small stomachs; and Miss Ellison began to be persuaded that it would be wiser to give a school a spring holiday in place of so many days at Christmas.

Elsie was very rude to Lisa, and said such ugly things to her that Virginia was shocked. Carter grumbled at everything. Mary had the

toothache, and Anna did nothing but jingle her Christmas bracelets.

Frances told Miss Ellison that she had been thinking about the guidon, and that she meant to try to behave. Even she, however, grew cross when the Home Guard at drill-time fell to fussing over flags and partners.

She tried to mend matters; but she only angered Elsie, and they had sharp words. Elsie was a queer child. Her father and mother were the richest people in Fairview. "Her mamma is stylish," Billy told Virginia. It seemed very queer to the children that Elsie was always with the servants. Her papa was away a greater part of the time, on business or pleasure. Sometimes her mother went with him, but even when she did not she was much from home with her friends. Once Elsie had had a little brother. He had died very suddenly, Jessie told the children; and Mrs. Harrison had kept away from home more and more since his death, for she had loved him much more than she did Elsie.

"Her mamma's not American," went on Jessie, who knew everything about grown-up people. "My papa says she's German."

One evening Virginia heard her mamma discussing the matter with her papa, who explained that Mr. Harrison had met his wife while traveling in Europe.

"Nobody knows much about her," he said. "It's a pity she leaves the child so much to the

servants. They teach her to judge everything by money, and to look down on people unless they are rich."

Elsie herself thought that her family was the richest and finest in Fairview, and so she put on what Carter called "airs."

But something happened in the "I Can School" which made Elsie a different girl. It was this.

One morning Virginia had reached the school gate when she was startled by screams. Billy and Carter and Margaret dashed from the schoolroom door calling Miss Ellison's name, and running towards the house of the principal as fast as they could.

"It's fire!" screamed Billy.

"It's Frances! Miss Ellison! Miss Ellison!"

In a moment Miss Ellison, followed by the principal and the janitor, reached the schoolroom, Virginia at their heels.

It was a dreadful sight. Virginia never forgot it.

Poor little Frances was terribly burned, and it was all Elsie's fault.

Miss Ellison hurried Carter for the doctor; and soon poor little Frances, her burns dressed, was on her way to Clover Nook. John, too, was badly burned about the hands. He had had the sense to run and get cloaks and wrap Frances in the thickest, thus smothering the flames. Lisa had shut the door and stopped the draught. It was only when Frances had

been taken home and all was settled that Miss Ellison heard what really had happened. The fire was not burning when the children arrived. The janitor could not be found to rekindle it, so Elsie and the boys went to the shed to get some sticks of wood. Elsie had spied a can of coal-oil.

The janitor had a bad habit of soaking the kindling in the oil, or else of pouring it over the wood after he placed it in the stove.

Miss Ellison, finding this out, had complained of the habit more than once.

When Elsie saw the can she at once seized it.

"I've always wanted to see it burn up," she said, and bore the can to the schoolroom.

As soon as Lisa saw the can she protested.

"Don't do that, Elsie," she said.

This made Elsie very angry.

"Mind your own affairs," she said.

Frances tried to make peace.

"O Elsie! remember the guidon. Miss Ellison don't let William use that, and people get burned up that way."

But Elsie only tossed her head. Then no one could tell what actually occurred; but suddenly there had been a scuffle over the can, then a blaze, and Frances was in flames.

The "I Can School" was so upset that the principal advised Miss Ellison to send the children home.

During all the trouble Elsie sat in her desk.

There was a hard, set look on her little white face.

"I didn't mean to burn her," she said when Miss Ellison tried to talk to her. "It was her own fault."

"She's a wicked girl," said Billy to Virginia; "did you hear her tell Miss Ellison that if Frances had minded her own affairs it wouldn't have happened?"

Virginia was very much shocked. If she had set fire to Frances she would have cried all day, but nobody had seen Elsie shed a tear.

"She's an awful girl, mamma," she said when she had told the story. "I guess I won't play with her till she's sorry."

For days the Little Captain was very, very ill.

"The doctor does not know yet whether she will ever get well," Miss Ellison told the children.

"I sent her grapes and flowers," said Elsie.

She was still very white, but she had not said she was sorry.

Virginia could not see why Miss Ellison was so fond of her.

"I would whip her hard if she were Lucretia or Catherine," she told Billy.

"I'd whup her if I was Miss McDowell," said Carter. "She ought to be Miss James's child. She pinches Tom when he's bad."

"My mamma whips," said Harry.

"My mamma, she locks you up," said Jessie.

After the accident the "I Can School" was very good. In the afternoon each child would take time to walk to Clover Nook to inquire for the Little Captain. It was a dreadful thing to think that Frances might die. It troubled Virginia so that she grew quite pale. On the day when the Little Captain was the sickest, Virginia started home without her Primer.

"I will need it for Lucretia and Catherine," she told Billy, and went back to get it.

At the door she paused.

Some one was crying.

She started in but stopped again when she saw Elsie. Miss Ellison had her in her lap.

"I am sorry," she heard her sob. "I've killed Frances, I've killed her, and what shall I do? What shall I do? Nobody loves me. Mamma don't. Oh, if somebody loved me!"

Virginia, frightened, crept away without her Primer.

That afternoon she saw Miss Ellison on her road to Clover Nook. She held Elsie's hand, and together they entered the great iron gates and went up the road to the house.

But Frances did not die. In a few weeks she was so well that her mother took her to Florida. Harry and his mother went also for a few weeks' stay. One day the "I Can School" wrote them both letters.

Harry sent two kinds of answers. The first was a nice letter telling the "I Can School" all about his trip.

The second was a new pupil. He was about six inches long, and he arrived in a box packed in moss.

Miss Ellison brought him to school one Monday morning. She told the children that a box had come directed to her. She had opened it, thinking it must be a present from some friend. She had put her hand right into the moss. "I felt something cold and wriggly," she said, "and here it is."

Then she showed the children the new pupil. She took out her roll book, and put down his name. It was Billy Alligator.

"Miss Ellison," asked the other Billy, "may I take the new pupil to the Principal and have him examined?" Miss Ellison laughed, and gave Billy the box.

When Billy returned she said that the Principal had decided that the new pupil must go in the Primer.

He was a very good pupil. He never rattled pencils, nor upset ink, nor got wet clay on the desks, nor failed in his lessons. He kept his mouth tightly closed, and made no noise of any kind. Instead of sitting in a desk, he lay in a pan of white sand. At recess the children would crowd around and watch him. If they touched him he would open his mouth "just like alligators do when you make them on the wall with your hands for shadows," said Mary.

But one day the children put the new pupil on the sand table. He strolled about in his

alligator way, and made the children laugh. But, alas, Billy Alligator strolled too near the edge of the table. "Oh!" screamed the children, for Billy Alligator, with a bump, struck the hard wood of the floor.

Whether he injured himself fatally, or whether the climate did not agree with him, no one could tell; but from that day he grew more and more quiet, and died without a word.

"Billy Alligator's dead, papa," announced Virginia one evening.

"My! My!" said Mr. Barton. "When will the funeral take place?"

"To-morrow, at recess," said Virginia.

One of the big boys dug a grave under the great beech in the school-yard, and there they laid Billy Alligator. The other Billy bore the coffin. It was of pasteboard covered with tissue paper. On the top were flowers which Elsie brought from her green-house.

Then followed a sad procession, Miss Ellison and the "I Can School" walking two by two. When the grave was arranged, Mary put up a headstone. It was made of wood. On it was printed:—

HERE LIES BILLY ALLIGATOR.
R. I. P.

"And that's the only death we've had in the 'I Can School,'" said Virginia, telling her papa about the funeral.

Before January was ended everybody noticed a change in Elsie.

"Mamma, she's polite even to Lisa," Virginia reported. "She gave her some lunch to-day." Virginia was very glad, for she did not like to be angry with Elsie.

"She plays mother better than anybody but Billy," she told her mamma.

Now that she was truly sorry, Virginia felt that she could go with her again.

Nobody else got into trouble in January; but something happened to Harry in February, after he had returned from his trip to Florida.

CHAPTER VI.

FEBRUARY.

IN February many things happened in the "I Can School." This seems very strange, for February is the shortest month in the year, but it was true. First, there was the trouble about the luncheon. Then there was the Thoughtful Club. Then St. Valentine, and George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln, all had birthdays.

The trouble about the luncheons was this.

One morning Virginia told Miss Ellison that her lunch was gone from her desk.

"And there was chocolate cake," she said sadly.

"And those boys took it," said Mary, pointing to John, Harry, and Alex.

"Tell tale," said Carter scornfully.

Miss Ellison looked them in their faces a moment.

"Did you, boys?" she asked.

They looked very red.

"Come out front," she said, and she stood them in a row.

Harry looked so innocent in his pretty sailor

suit, with the big collar, that Virginia was sure it was not he who had taken her cake.

"And did you take it?" asked Miss Ellison sadly. It always hurt her to have the "I Can School" naughty.

"Yes'm." Down went all the heads.

"And why?"

"'Cause we were hungry," said Harry.

"'Cause it was good," said John.

Alex was silent.

Miss Ellison's look made him feel bad.

"Then what are you?" asked Miss Ellison severely. "What are people who take what does not belong to them?"

Virginia grew cold at the thought of such a question. She was sure that she would die of shame if Miss Ellison should say such an awful thing to her.

"Thieves!" said Harry.

"Thieves!" said John.

But Alex could not bring himself to utter this awful word.

Instead he drew his coat-sleeve across his eyes.

"If your mother," went on Miss Ellison, "made a lovely big chocolate cake and put it on the sideboard, and a tramp walked in and carried it off, what would he be?"

"A thief," said Harry, shuffling his feet and looking down. "A thief," said John, still brave.

But Alex had begun to cry. His face was entirely hidden on his coat-sleeve.

Virginia whispered to Billy that she thought he must be the best of the boys.

Billy shrugged her shoulders.

"Maybe," said this knowing little girl. "I don't like cry babies."

For punishment Miss Ellison said the three little boys must remain in at recess for a week, and that on the morrow each must bring Virginia lunch in place of the one he had taken.

At this the three little boys looked very grave.

They were not in the habit of bringing lunches, and they would have to tell their mothers why they wanted them. Billy said that was the reason why Miss Ellison had made up this punishment.

Next morning Alex, shamefaced, blushing, handed Virginia a bag of oatmeal crackers. He had taken five cents from his bank to buy them.

Johnnie handed her a small bundle. In it were biscuits upon which he had accidentally sat in the chapel.

Harry's lunch was wrapped in a napkin, and looked very nice. Virginia opened it, and found beaten biscuits and maccaroons. She looked at both of these articles, and she felt very glad that the boys had taken her chocolate cake. She promised to share this fine luncheon with Billy.

At recess Harry's big sister came into the room. The older pupils were always dismissed before the primary ones.

"Miss Ellison," she said, "will you please ask Harry to give me my lunch? He took it off the sideboard where mamma left it."

At this Harry began to grin.

"Where is Dorothy's lunch, Harry?" inquired Miss Ellison. "Give it to her."

"Virginia's got it," said Harry.

"Why, Harry Armstrong!" cried Miss Ellison. "Do you mean to say that you took a second lunch to pay back for the first?"

"Yes'm," said Harry.

"And why?"

"'Cause I didn't want mamma to know about Virginia's."

"All of which goes to prove," said Mr. Barton, when Virginia told him of what he called Harry's iniquity, "that Solomon knew little boys and what they need much better than all the lady teachers in the world."

"Billy says," remarked Virginia, "that Harry meant it for a joke."

Billy and Virginia liked Harry the best of all the boys. When one likes a person it is sometimes very easy to make excuses for him. But Miss Ellison did not see it in that way.

She sent Harry to the Lady Principal. He came back looking very serious, and he did not open his mouth, unless Miss Ellison asked him a question, for a whole week.

The next thing which happened was the Thoughtful Club.

On the first Friday in February Miss Ellison

asked the "I Can School" how it would like to have a club.

The children were delighted; and Virginia beamed at the thought of belonging to something, like her mother, who went to the city once a month, to attend the meetings of the Woman's Club. First Miss Ellison explained that every club must have rules. Then she read the rules of the club which they were to form. She called these rules a Constitution. Here they are:—

ARTICLE I. — The name of the club shall be the "Thoughtful Club."

ARTICLE II. — The object of this club shall be to make the members forget themselves in little thoughtful acts for others.

ARTICLE III. — The members shall be the pupils of the "I Can School."

ARTICLE IV. — The officers shall be a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer.

ARTICLE V. — Every member must agree to do one thoughtful act each week, and, at the club meeting, report some thoughtful act they have seen another do. Also the club as a body must do something each week for the good of some person or institution.

The children decided that they would wear red ribbon badges, and paint T. C. on them in gold letters.

"When you see them," said Miss Ellison,

"it will remind you to think more of other people than you do of yourself."

Then came the election of officers. Mary was elected President; Harry, Vice-President; Sallie, Secretary; and Elsie, Treasurer.

"I belong to a club," said Virginia to her papa.

"The heaviest blow of all, Miss Barton!" and he tore his hair in mock desperation. "First, a daughter of letters, then a daughter of fashion, now a daughter of clubs."

But Virginia decided that the Thoughtful Club was the best part of the "I Can School." It met on Friday, after the recess. First came the business, and then the entertainment. On the first Friday, Miss Ellison and the Third Readers arranged the programme. On the second Friday, the Second Readers took charge of matters. On the third, Miss Ellison announced, the First Readers and Primers would get up a programme.

Virginia was much troubled. So was Billy. They could think of nothing. The Third Readers had had animal games with prizes; the Second Readers had had a drawing game. Now what could the First Readers and Primers do? At last they went to Mrs. Barton.

"Oh, mamma!"

"Oh, Mrs. Barton!" they cried, when they heard what she proposed.

"It will be nicer than anything yet," said Billy. "They'll like it better than games."

"Carter will," said Virginia.

When Friday came, Mary took the chair. That means that she sat by the desk, and rapped with a ruler.

"The Thoughtful Club will please come to order," she said.

Then the Secretary read the account of the meeting of the week before. Miss Ellison called this the Minutes. After this, each child told of some thoughtful thing he or she had tried to do. Then Miss Ellison gave each of them something to do for the coming week. Then each child pasted some pictures in a scrap-book. These scrap-books were to be taken later on to the Children's Hospital.

All this time the eyes of the "I Can School" had been wandering to the big table. It was all covered with papers. Under those papers, they knew, was the entertainment provided by the Primers and First Readers. Virginia and Billy looked very important. At last the business was ended.

The Primers and First Readers hurried to the table. They pushed off the papers, and there was Miss Ellison's chafing-dish. Beside it stood her blue cups and saucers.

Under a big napkin were plates of sugary cookies and a huge dish of whipped cream.

Miss Ellison made chocolate in the chafing-dish. She filled the little cups half full, and then heaped them up with whipped cream.

The Primers and First Readers passed the cups. Then they carried round the cakes.

"I'd ruther eat than play games," said Carter: "this wuz the nicest club-meeting yet. I like clubs when they have things to eat. It's better than so much talking."

This made Virginia and Billy very happy. Carter was a hard person to please. He seldom praised anything, but he always knew what was wrong.

"Some day he will be an editor," said Miss Ellison.

"Like my papa," answered Carter. "That's what I want to be."

On the fourteenth of February, Miss Ellison told the "I Can School" about old Bishop Valentine.

"Once he cured a little lame boy, papa," said Virginia that evening; "and that's the reason why we do things for other people to-day, — send things, you know."

Miss Ellison let the children have a Valentine Box. It stood on her table, and the children slipped in their valentines through a slit in the lid.

Just before the close of school Miss Ellison opened it, and distributed the valentines. Virginia had six. One was a beauty. It had a piece of stiff cardboard glued on at the back.

"You can stand it up," said Billy. She showed a very deep interest in this one valentine.

"You can stand it up," she repeated, pulling

out the board. Virginia wondered how Billy knew just how to fix it.

"She sent it, you goosie," said Carter, watching Virginia open number two.

"It's got verses on it," he added anxiously, when Virginia, content with its outside beauty, was not investigating the inside.

"You sent that one," said Billy triumphantly.

Miss Ellison had one from every child.

Before the "I Can School" went home, Miss Ellison begged all the children to be very careful and hurt no one's feelings by sending comic ones with unkind verses. "And, children," she added, "I want every one of you to send one to some child who won't get any other-wise; will you?"

The children all promised.

"I will send one to Lucretia and Catherine," said Virginia to Billy. "Do you think any one else will send them any?"

"No, I don't," said Billy. "I guess they won't get any others. I'm going to send one to Miss Mason. She'll never guess who sent it. I like Miss Mason anyhow."

The other birthdays in February were not so much fun as Bishop Valentine's.

When Lincoln's birthday came, they all wrote compositions. They each had a picture to paste on. Virginia's was Lincoln himself. Billy had a log house, which was his first home.

At first the "I Can School" meant to celebrate George Washington's birthday with another entertainment. Miss Ellison, however, said entertainments were too upsetting. They are apt, she said, to give a teacher nervous prostration. It would be just as patriotic and much quieter to write compositions.

She gave them pictures of Washington, of Lady Washington, and of Mount Vernon, the home of the Washingtons. Then she told them all about Washington, what a good boy he was, and how very, very neatly he kept his copy-books.

Here all the little boys made faces. They felt that it was very hard really to like anybody, except a girl, who kept a neat copy-book.

Then Miss Ellison told how, later on, Washington fought for our country and conquered the British.

This made the boys feel better. It was all right to fight, but they had their own ideas about copy-books.

Then Miss Ellison let Carter tell the story of the hatchet; and then John, who seldom opened his mouth, jumped up and asked if he could tell the story of the great man of Switzerland.

Virginia thought the story of William Tell, and of how he shot the apple from his son's head, the finest story she ever had heard.

When the time came to write the compo-

sitions she was very much mixed up as to exactly what either of the heroes did; but Miss Ellison spelled for her, and she wrote this. She had stopped printing now.

"I love George Washington.
He was a good boy.
He wore a queue.
He cut an apple-tree for his son.
He has nice red cheeks.
I will name a child for him.
My mamma will give me a new
boy doll when I am seven.
Its name is George Washing-
ton."

Virginia was very proud of her composition until she looked at Elizabeth's. Elizabeth was only seven, but she was in the Second Reader, and could write as plain as a copy-book. Her composition was four pages long, and told many, many things about Washington. When the compositions were finished and tacked up about the room, Miss Ellison let the "I Can School" mold in the clay.

The boys tried to make hatchets. The little girls did make nice round cherries.

Just before the bell rang, Miss Ellison told the children that Washington's birthday would be a holiday, and that they need not come to school.

"I like George Washington," said Virginia. "He loved to go to school, but he gives us a holiday."

Her papa laughed, and started to say something.

"Now, Edward, don't," said his wife quickly. "You must, at least, let Virginia alone about Washington."

CHAPTER VII.

MARCH.

NOTHING happened in the "I Can School" in the early part of March but lessons.

"This is a good working month," said Miss Ellison; so she gave very long, hard lessons.

Towards the end of the month Frances returned from Florida, and came back to school. She was quite well again. Fortunately, the burns were not where the scars could show, so she looked as pretty as before the accident. At first Elsie was very shy with her; but Frances wanted to be friends, and soon all was right.

One day Elsie would not come with the rest to recess.

"I want to talk to Miss Ellison," she said.

The children wondered what the talk was about. They peeped in the window, and concluded that it must be nice, for Miss Ellison looked very much pleased. Sometimes Virginia felt that she wished Miss Ellison did not think so much of Elsie.

"She cares more for her now than for any of the children," she told her mamma.

"It is because Elsie needs her, Virginia," said Mrs. Barton.

On the day after Miss Ellison's talk with Elsie, the "I Can School" were told that something very nice was to happen in a week. In the meantime, however, they must go on with their blank books. In these books they were to write the name of each bird and of each flower as they appeared in the spring.

The schoolhouse stood in a large yard. In it grew a little forest of trees. Virginia loved the squirrels which were always running about the branches, and now the birds began to fly about them also.

About a half mile from the school was a real wood. Every once in a while, in the afternoon, Miss Ellison would take the children and walk up to these woods to see if the flowers were stirring. Virginia was proud of her blank-book.

"I will keep it neat, like George Washington," she said.

In a week Miss Ellison told the "I Can School" about the pleasant thing. Elsie had discovered that she and Frances and Lisa all had a birthday on the same date. Her mamma had given her permission to have a party for the three. It was to be given at the club house, as the Harrisons' house was too far for the children who had no carriages.

"It will be a Red, White, and Blue Party," said Elsie, "because of the Home Guard. It is from three to six on Friday."

Virginia was very much puzzled when she heard that the party was to be for Lisa too.

"Elsie," she said, "you told me not to go with the Swiss."

Elsie looked very much ashamed.

"I know, Virginia," she said. "I am trying to be different. Do you remember the guidon? I am trying to follow it. I promised Miss Ellison."

It was very hard for Elsie to say this. She was a child who liked to keep her thoughts to herself.

Virginia was very glad that she could go with the Swiss. At recess she went up to Lisa and offered her a biscuit. This was Virginia's first step in the road of friendship. So far she had found it invariably successful.

"My goodness!" said Mr. Barton, when he heard of the party. "More gayety! Are you quite sure, Miss Barton, that it will not interfere with your studies?"

Virginia was quite sure. To prove it she brought her Primer, and her father had to hear about the white hen and the red cherry.

On the day of the party Mrs. Barton laid out Virginia's best clothes. Her dress was of soft pink silk, and the trimming was of lace and ribbons. Virginia would have liked to take Lucretia; but her mamma told her that this was a big party, where children so young as Lucretia would be decidedly in the way.

"Instead of Lucretia, I will go with you,"

she said ; and then she told Virginia that Mrs. Harrison had invited all the mammas.

“And the Bird Man, mamma?” cried Virginia.

Virginia loved the Bird Man next best to her mamma and papa and grandma and Uncle John and Lucretia and Miss Ellison. He came to the “I Can School” once a week and told the children about birds.

He knew all sorts of things about them — how they build their nests, how they train their children, how they sing, what they look like. The Bird Man studied the ways of birds for a living. He wrote about them for papers and magazines, and gave talks at different schools. He was gentle and kind with children, and never laughed at their answers.

Mrs. Barton did not know whether he would be at the party or not.

Virginia hoped so. She would like the Bird Man to see her new clothes.

When she saw the club house she thought it the loveliest place that she had ever seen. It was decorated in red roses, white roses, and violets for blue. Between the large room and the room where the table was set was a screen made of smilax and the three kinds of flowers. Flags were draped about the walls, and garlands of greens and small flags were carried from the chandelier to the four corners of the room.

When Mrs. Barton and Virginia arrived, almost all the children were there. The little

girls went wandering round, looking at the flowers; but all the boys were again in a corner by themselves. Their collars were very high, and their faces were very red; and Virginia noticed, with surprise, that the hands of all were very, very clean. She had never before known how clean little boys' hands could be.

Elsie, Lisa, and Frances stood by the screen of flowers. Their dresses were made alike, but were of different colors. Frances wore white; Lisa, blue; Elsie, red. They were made of silk, and were birthday presents from Mrs. Harrison.

The most puzzling thing to Virginia was the way the boys acted.

They stayed in the corner and said, "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am," when anybody chanced to speak to them. They looked at the little girls as if they hated them.

When a lady sat down at the piano and began to play, Virginia went up to Carter.

"Let's dance," she began to say, when Billy pulled her away.

"You mustn't ask boys to dance, Virginia," she said; "they'll ask you."

This puzzled Virginia still more. It was all very well to say "they'll ask you," but, certainly, they did not ask her nor any one else; nor would they dance at all until their mothers took them by their shoulders and made them.

By and by, however, their shyness wore off; and the mothers looked worried and said, "Don't."

As the boys hated dancing, Miss Ellison proposed games.

Then came the part Virginia called the party.

The cake made all the children go "Oh!"

It was made in the city by a lady confectioner. When she heard that it was for the birthday of three little children she made a center-piece of three little lambs in icing. Around them was a clover leaf made of candles. Each curve stood for one birthday. Elsa's curve was of lovely blue candles, Frances's curve was of white ones, Elsie's of red.

The ices and cakes were made to represent American flags.

At every child's place was a little box tied with red, white, and blue ribbon.

When Virginia opened hers she cried, "Oh Billy, it's a pin!"

"It's the guidon," explained Elsie.

"To make us all remember," said Miss Ellison, pinning hers on the front of her dress. It was made of silver, enameled with red, and shaped like the real guidon.

Just as the party was ending a strange thing happened.

Virginia and her mother were standing by Mrs. Harrison when they noticed some one come to the door and look in, as if hunting for some child. She was so plainly dressed that Virginia thought it must be a nurse. Mrs. Harrison, seeing her, went to the door.

"Do you want any one?" she began to ask, when all the ladies were startled by a cry.

"Elsa! Elsa!"

The strange person was holding out both her hands to Mrs. Harrison. To the surprise of the ladies Elsie's mother burst into tears, and threw her arms around the strange person at the door.

"It is a very interesting story," Mrs. Barton told her husband that evening. "When Mrs. Harrison was a little girl of ten or eleven, she was adopted by some wealthy English people, who took a fancy to her when traveling in Switzerland. At their home she met Mr. Harrison, who married her. She was never permitted to write to her own people by her adopted parents, and in time she lost all trace of them. This, it seems, is an older sister, one who was always very devoted to the pretty little Elsa."

"Lisa's mamma is Elsie's aunt, isn't she, mamma?" inquired Virginia, who had been listening with great interest.

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Barton. "It seems," and she turned to her husband, "that this older sister married when very young, and her husband decided to come to America. They drifted to Fairview, where the husband has been working land on shares. They are very poor, — so poor that Lisa could not have come to the party if Mrs. Harrison had not thought of giving the children dresses for presents.

Mrs. McDowell agreed about Frances, so that Lisa would not be hurt. The mother had heard Lisa talk of Elsie; but she had no idea that the rich Mrs. Harrison was her own sister, — her pretty little Elsa.”

Virginia thought it very strange that Elsie and Lisa should be cousins. In spite of Elsie’s improved ways she was not very happy over it. It was hard to know that her family was not so fine as the servants had taught her to believe, and, too, it was harder still to have the children all find out that the children whom she had treated so badly were her own first cousins.

Her father at once got Lisa’s father something better to do. Then he offered them for a home a house which stood on his own place. Mrs. Harrison at once bought good clothes for her sister and the children.

“It’s like the stories in the fairy books,” said Virginia. “The poor people turn out kings and queens.”

“All which, Miss Barton,” said her father meaningly, “would teach us that it is just as well to be kind and polite to everybody, even to the Swiss.”

“Yes, papa,” said Virginia.

Her face grew quite red. Her own small conscience was not altogether easy on the subject of Lisa.

The rest of March was nothing but lessons. The Third Readers finished their books; the

Second Readers wrote the last word in their copy-books; the First Readers began painting in lovely new color books.

Billy had gone into the Second Reader, and was now learning definitions of spelling words.

One day Miss Ellison asked her to spell woman.

"W-o-," said Billy, "m-a-n — woman."

"What does woman mean?" asked Miss Ellison.

Billy struggled a little and wrinkled her brow.

At last she got out the definition she had learned. Her sister had found it for her in the big dictionary.

"A woman is an adult female of the human race."

"My!" said Carter, "isn't Billy smart!"

Virginia thought this such a grand definition that she asked Billy to teach it to her.

"Lucretia and Catherine know it now, too," she told her father. "They're going to be women, Billy says, and they must know what they are."

"Most certainly, Miss Barton," said her father, "I entirely approve of your educational methods in bringing up your children."

The proudest moment of Virginia's life occurred on March 30. Miss Ellison called her to her knee.

"Virginia," she said, smoothing her curls, "on Monday you may bring a First Reader."

You know the Primer so well that I think you would like something different."

Then Miss Ellison kissed her, and sent her to her seat. That night Mr. Barton learned that he must purchase a First Reader.

When he brought it home Mr. Barton covered it with brown paper, and he printed Virginia's name on the outside, and wrote it within.

First Readers do not seem to be gloomy things; but this one made Mrs. Barton very sad. "Virginia is growing old too fast," she told her husband. "To think of my baby being in the First Reader!"

"And my baby too," said Virginia. "I have just told Catherine that she is ready for the First Reader too. Lucretia is too stupid. She can't tell the difference between the white hen and the black cat, even when I show her the pictures."

CHAPTER VIII.

APRIL.

THE Bird Man was not at the party, but he came the next week to school.

"Spring is early this year," he said. "We must keep our eyes open for the birds."

Then he gave his talk. He told them about the Kentucky birds, and their ways. The blue-bird, he said, is more loving than any of the other birds. The papa blue-bird loves the mamma blue-bird, and has little calls for her which no one else understands. The Bird Man called them love notes. Virginia hoped blue-birds would build in their trees.

When the days were pleasant the Bird Man took the children to walk. He taught them to know the birds by their notes. Virginia always walked by the Bird Man, holding fast to his hand, and listening very intently. She loved the Bird Man, and she loved the birds. It made her very happy to hear that the birds flying about in her yard were hunting places to build nests.

"I will teach Lucretia and Catherine to be kind to birds," she told her father. "The

Bird Man says it shows a good heart to love them."

The favorite bird with the "I Can School" was the cardinal. Perhaps it was because of its lovely color, or its clear whistle, or because it stays in Kentucky all the year.

The Bird Man told them of how men—bird-fanciers he called them—go into the woods in the autumn. They carry queer little wooden cages, in which they place birds, called decoys. These birds are made of wood, and have feathers glued on them. The men wait until they hear the whistle of a cardinal or catch a glimpse of red in the leaves of the trees.

Then they creep to some place near by.

They place the cage in an open spot, and sprinkle food about on its floor.

Then they hide and give a whistle as much like a cardinal as they can.

The real cardinal hears it. It does not sound quite right, but still he must find out who wants him.

He flies near. He sees another cardinal, and smells food. He flies to the ground.

The other cardinal makes no sign.

The real one pauses and looks all about him, cocking his little head from side to side. The world is full of danger. He must be careful. He sees no boys. The wood is very still. He smells the food, and in he goes. "Down comes the door, and the cardinal is caught," said the Bird Man.

Carter told the Bird Man of how he had seen one of these men in the woods the autumn before; and of how he had caught a cardinal while Carter was watching him.

"I would have shooed it away," said Billy indignantly. "I wouldn't have stood by and let a wicked man get a cardinal."

The Bird Man had a large book full of colored pictures of all kinds of birds. When the Bird Man wanted the children to learn a particular bird, he would show them its picture. Then he would tell them all about it, and when they took the walks they would be on the watch for that bird.

Virginia loved the thrush. A pair of them, later on, built a nest in the beech outside the school, just above the grave of Billy Alligator. As the days grew warmer Mr. Thrush used to sing lovely songs at just the time when Virginia was called upon to tell Miss Ellison what was the sum of 2 and 2, or the difference between 4 and 1. She would listen so to Mr. Thrush that she would say 5 or 6 or any other number without knowing why she said it.

When Miss Ellison heard how much Virginia liked the thrush she taught her a little piece beginning: "There's a merry brown thrush sitting up in the tree."

The bird which the children did not like was the jay. There were dozens of them in the trees about the schoolhouse. They were always flying about, screaming and quarreling.

Their noise and rough ways frightened off the gentle birds because, the Bird Man said, song birds hate chatter and cries. The colored janitor told Virginia that nobody ever sees a jay on Saturday.

"Why, William!" cried Virginia. "Where do they go?"

"Law, honey," said William, looking very solemn, "don' you know? Why, dey go ter de bad place, dey do, sho, honey."

The sparrows, too, were very quarrelsome. One day Virginia and Carter saw a lovely bird on the branch of a linden. It was quite long, and of a graceful shape. Its color was soft gray, and its bill was yellow. It was enjoying a rest on the limb, when a sparrow flew up. It took its position on a limb near the gray bird. It made no sound, but stared hard at the stranger.

The gray bird became very nervous. It fidgeted and moved uneasily. The sparrow stared on. The gray bird flew to another limb. The sparrow followed. It stared as before.

This happened six times.

The gray bird grew more and more restless. Suddenly the sparrow flew away. The gray bird brightened up. It settled itself in comfort. Its tormentor was gone, and it could enjoy the quiet shade of the tree.

Suddenly, back came the sparrow, but not alone. There was another sparrow with him.

The two took positions near the gray bird and stared very hard. At last the poor gray bird, wild with nervousness, flew entirely away from the tree.

When the Bird Man heard the story, he told Virginia that the gray bird was the yellow-billed cuckoo. "People about here call it the rain crow," he added, "because it utters mournful cries in threatening weather."

Virginia enjoyed the wild flowers also. One afternoon Miss Ellison took them to the woods. At first they saw the ground covered with nothing but dry brown leaves. They walked along the bank of a little stream, and rustled the leaves with their feet as they went.

Suddenly there was a sound which made them all jump. A rabbit sprang up at Virginia's feet. It leaped across the little brook, and went loping up the opposite bank. With a sudden dash it disappeared behind the hill.

"The darling thing!" cried Billy. "I wish that he were mine."

Suddenly something else happened. Elizabeth gave a cry, and stooped quickly to the ground.

"Bloodroot! bloodroot! Miss Ellison, bloodroot!" she called.

Sure enough scattered like snow on the dull brown ground were dozens and dozens of lovely white flowers.

"Why do they call it bloodroot?" asked Virginia.

It seemed a very ugly name for so pretty a flower.

Miss Ellison smiled.

"Gather a little and you will find out," she said.

Miss Ellison forbade the children to trouble the roots.

"People are driving out all the wild flowers," she said. "They think they want them, and dig them up by the roots; and then when they wither they throw them away."

When Virginia's hands were full of flowers she discovered why the plant is called blood-root. Her fingers were stained red, as if she had cut one of them.

Later in the spring they found, in the same wood, twinleaf, and toothwort, and trillium, and dogtooth violets; and every day violets and jack-in-the-pulpit.

"In May," said Miss Ellison, on the day of the walk, "we will have a picnic, and go to the old mill in Lloydsborough Valley."

The children drew pictures of the flowers they found, and painted them in their natural colors. Underneath the pictures they printed their names and the dates of finding them.

The large girls in the botany classes also were studying the flowers. When Miss Ellison pinned the paintings upon the walls, they came in at recess and praised their fine looks.

The "I Can School" also wrote the history of the flowers in their blank books. It was

very hard work for Virginia. It was sometimes even harder work for Miss Ellison to tell which of Virginia's paintings represented blood-root, which anemones.

"Never mind," she said; "next year, Virginia, you will do better."

In April a very sad thing happened. Billy had to give up Dot. Dot had been loaned to her by Mr. Davis. One day, two years before Billy came to the "I Can School," her mamma had sent her away to spend the day with Mary. When she was well out of sight, a man appeared leading a rough, dirty-looking, little pony. Her hair was matted and ragged, and nobody could realize that she could ever be pretty. But John, the hired man, got a great wash-tub full of warm soap-suds. He put the pony right into it and gave her a bath. Then he combed and brushed her hair.

That evening, when the family sat at dinner, there came a ring at the bell.

"You go, Evelyn," said Billy's mamma.

All the family followed in time to see Billy open the door. There stood a pony harnessed to a little cart.

"It is for you, Evelyn," said her mother. "Mr. Davis wants you to use it until he is ready to sell the pony."

From the beginning Billy and Dot were the closest of friends. It almost broke her heart to think of ever giving Dot up; but now Mr. Davis wanted to sell her.

Billy's mamma had never let her forget that Dot did not belong to her. She showed her how much it had meant to have Dot, even if, in the end, she must be sold. Billy saw all this, but still the trial was very hard.

Virginia loved Dot, too, and was never tired of listening to stories about her. She especially liked the one about Dot and the Christmas-tree.

Billy's mamma had dressed her a lovely tree. When she was taken into the parlor, her eye fell upon three ears of corn marked, "For Dot." There was a white one, a red one, and a black one which passed for blue. They were tied with a long bow of ribbon.

Before any one saw what Billy was about, she had rushed from the room. In a few moments she returned, bringing Dot right through the hall into the parlor, and up to the tree.

When Dot saw the corn, she just opened her mouth, and before any one could stop her, ate her Christmas present in a few moments.

Dot, Billy said, hated boys. She loved girls, but raised her heels if a boy came near her.

Every day Billy would either drive or ride Dot to the "I Can School." She often stopped for Virginia and brought her along.

And now Dot must be sold! Mr. Davis sent word to Billy's papa that he could make a better sale of Dot if Billy could come down and ride her before the purchasers.

When these horse sales take place all the

neighborhood is invited. A luncheon is provided, and the sale continues until sundown.

Billy's mamma wrote Miss Ellison a note, asking her to excuse Billy from school because of Mr. Davis's request.

Miss Ellison consenting, the "I Can School" saw Billy drive away with Dot for the last time. It made Virginia so sad that she shed tears over the parting until the green of the leaf she was painting ran into the red of a flower.

The next day, Billy told the "I Can School" what had happened at the sale. Mr. Davis had had her drive Dot around and around. Then a saddle had been put upon her, and Billy had ridden her. When Dot was offered for sale she was knocked down to a gentleman for one hundred and twenty dollars.

"I will make it a hundred more if you will throw in the little girl," said the gentleman.

He came from across in Ohio, he said, and he had four boys and no girls.

Much as Billy loved Dot, she could not consent to be sold for one hundred dollars, so she and her pony had to part.

Billy was sad for days. Nobody could make her laugh.

"Do you think that I can smile with Dot gone?" she asked.

Virginia was sad, too; but she could comfort herself with the society of Catherine and Lucretia.

One day Billy received a letter. It was from the gentleman who had bought Billy.

The pony, he wrote, grieved all the way.

He put her comfortably in his stable, and thought she would soon forget her little mistress. But what did Dot do but escape from her stall, and galloping to the river, start to swim across towards Kentucky!

This letter was a great comfort to Billy. It proved to her that Dot loved her as much as she loved Dot.

Another thing which happened in April was the visit which the Thoughtful Club paid to the Children's Hospital.

Miss Ellison took them on Visitors' Day. They carried the scrap-books which they had made, and all the toys which they could spare from their playrooms.

The head nurse took them into the wards, and showed them the little children lying in the white iron beds.

Virginia felt very sad when she saw them. It must be a dreadful thing to be strapped in bed, and not be able to turn your head even when a man has a hand-organ and a monkey on the sidewalk.

The "I Can School" tip-toed about, and gave each child a present. Then Miss Ellison told them all a lovely story. Virginia liked best a lovely little girl of about her own age. She was not in bed like the rest, but walked about the ward using a little crutch. Her face

was so bright and happy, that Miss Ellison spoke of it to the nurse.

"And no wonder!" she answered. "Poor little thing! She has been here eleven months, and to-morrow she is to go home to her mother in Georgia. She could not walk a step when they brought her here."

Virginia could not take her eyes from the little girl's face. It would be fine to walk with a crutch. It was like stilts. But to be away from one's mother! She could never stand that.

The Thoughtful Club had never seen such good children. They all smiled at the visitors, and said nothing about their pains.

"And they can't never have candy nuther," said Carter, who had been reading the printed rules on the door.

The nurse smiled.

"Once a week," she said, "a gentleman comes to see them. He is old and white-haired like Santa Claus. He has come every Sunday afternoon since the hospital was first opened; and he has always brought a bag of chocolate candy. The doctors permit him to give each child two pieces."

"Only two pieces?" asked Carter scornfully. "I can eat a dozen."

"But you are well," said the nurse. "These children are happy with the two. Any more would make them sick."

Another thing which the Thoughtful Club

did, was to pay a visit to Mrs. McDowell in return for one which she paid to the club. On the occasion of her visit she had talked to them about the soldiers in the Philippines, and had told them of how much they need things to read.

"Why, children," she said, "I used to go and read to the sick men in the hospitals. I found that they were glad to hear even my home letters because they were so hungry for news from America. Now that I am back in Kentucky I can't forget those men in the hospitals. When I can I send them books and magazines and papers. It is hard for me to collect enough. Will you children promise to help me get more?"

The Thoughtful Club was very much pleased with the idea of doing things for soldiers. They collected great piles of reading matter. Each little girl made for the soldiers what is called a Comfort Bag. It consisted of a little draw-string bag of calico, containing needles, thread, buttons, a big thimble, and a pair of scissors with blunt points.

The boys wrote letters, which were slipped into the bags. They told of the Thoughtful Club, and of how the "I Can School" loved the soldiers.

"I'm glad we beat old Spain," Carter wrote in his. "Hurrah for the red, white, and blue!"

CHAPTER IX.

MAY.

IN Kentucky the real May Day comes in a part of the month too chilly for picnics. Miss Ellison, therefore, decided that the May holiday must take place later in the month.

"On that day," she said, "we will have our picnic."

One Monday she rapped for attention, and told the children that the picnic would take place the coming Friday.

"First," she added, "we must decide about our lunch, and then elect the King and Queen of the May."

She then proposed that each child should bring a large quantity of one thing rather than a small portion of many. Virginia, for instance, might bring a cake; Elizabeth, lemons; Billy, sandwiches; Carter, chicken.

"I am sure your mothers will find this to be far less trouble," said Miss Ellison.

When the lunch matter had been settled, Miss Ellison tore paper into small strips.

"Mary and George may be tellers," she said.

Then she gave them the slips, and told them to give one to each child.

"Now you may write on your paper the name of the girl you would like for queen."

Virginia felt very important. She knew that men voted, but she did not know that women were ever permitted to do so.

She printed "Billy" on her slip, and folded it very tight in her hand so that no one could know how she had voted. She had had to ask Billy how to spell her name, but she had not told her why she wanted to know. When every one was ready the tellers took two hats and, passing down the aisles, collected the votes.

Miss Ellison read them, and the tellers kept the tally on the blackboard. That means that they made a mark under the name of a person each time it was called.

"Virginia Barton, one," read Miss Ellison.

Virginia's face grew round and beaming. How lovely it would be to be queen, and wear a crown like the ladies in the fairy tales! And how pleased her papa would be to have a queen for a daughter!

"Virginia Barton, one," said the teller.

"Mary Lee," read Miss Ellison.

"Mary Lee, one," repeated the teller.

"Jessie Morton."

"Jessie Morton, one."

"Virginia Barton."

Virginia jumped up and down in her seat. Was she to be a queen? Nobody told her that

a candidate for office should show a becoming indifference during the election.

"Barton, two."

"Billy."

Billy squeezed Virginia's hand. She, too, had leanings toward royalty.

This complicated matters for Virginia. She wanted to be queen, but she did not care to have Billy disappointed.

"Frances."

"Frances, one."

"Barton."

Virginia slipped into the front desk. It seemed nearer victory.

"Barton, three."

"You'll get it," whispered Billy.

"Billy," said Miss Ellison.

"No, you," said Virginia politely.

"Billy, two."

On went the voting, Virginia in the lead. Suddenly there entered into the race what her papa told her that evening is called "the dark horse."

"Elizabeth Wilcox."

"Elizabeth, one."

"Wilcox."

"Wilcox, two."

"Wilcox."

"Wilcox, three."

"Wilcox."

Virginia began to look very sober, and Billy held her breath.

"Wilcox, four."

"Billy."

"Billy, four."

Billy smiled triumphantly.

"Wilcox."

"Wilcox, five."

"Wilcox, six."

"Wilcox, seven."

"Well, Elizabeth," said Miss Ellison, patting a little brown head, "you have it, dear. You are our little Queen of the May."

"So you went up Salt River," said her father, when he heard of the defeat of his daughter.

"No, papa," said Virginia puzzled. "I didn't get elected."

"Then you certainly went up Salt River," said her father solemnly.

"Edward, don't," said his wife; "isn't it hard enough on the child to have had this disappointment without her being teased? The Salt River, Virginia, is a place where people are said to go when they are defeated in elections."

"Billy went up Salt River, too," said Virginia; "but Harry did not. He was elected King."

"Do you think it is going to rain to-morrow?" asked Virginia Thursday at breakfast. She had tried to persuade herself that it was not a gloomy morning.

"No, I hardly think it is going to rain,"

answered Mr. Barton; "but it is cloudy and chilly, Virginia, and to-morrow will be too cold for a little girl like you to go to the woods. We are sorry, Virginia; but mamma and I have talked it over, and unless the picnic is postponed I am afraid you won't be able to go."

Virginia was very unhappy. She cried all the way to school.

"I can't go to the picnic," she sobbed. "Papa thinks that it is too cold."

"Never mind," said Miss Ellison. "You will go after all, for it is too cold for any of us to go. The picnic will be next Friday."

"Goody! Goody!" cried Carter. "My mamma, she said, I'd get pneumonia."

Sometimes Miss Ellison read aloud to the "I Can School," and the books the children liked best were by a friend of Miss Ellison's.

"I would like to see that lady," said Carter one day.

Miss Ellison had smiled at the time, as if she knew something pleasant. Now she told the "I Can School" that since the picnic had been postponed the lady who wrote books would be able to come and be their guest.

The children were delighted. They had listened to many books, but they had never seen a single person who had written one.

The week passed very slowly. At last Friday again arrived.

"Is it nice, mamma?" called Virginia, the moment she opened her eyes.

It was nice. The sun was shining gayly, and there was a sound of bird songs in the garden.

At 9.30 the "I Can School" stood on the platform at the station awaiting the train. With the children had come many of the mammas. Near Miss Ellison was the Lady Principal and a pretty lady who looked like a school-girl. All the children were staring at her.

"She wrote them books," said Carter, blushing very red when he felt the eyes of the lady upon him.

"O Carter!" cried his pretty mamma, "do try to speak correctly."

Just then the train came round the curve in front of the schoolhouse.

"Be careful," cried all the mothers as the children rushed on.

Virginia took a seat by a window. She beckoned to Billy to come and sit by her. Billy, however, had made friends with the lady who wrote books, and had no mind to leave her. Just then some one sat down in the seat beside Virginia. She looked up, and grew cold all over.

It was the Lady Principal! As the train moved along the Lady Principal spoke to her. She called Virginia by her name, and smiled.

The Lady Principal's picnic voice was entirely different from her chapel voice. Virginia felt herself grow warm again. She even smiled back at the Lady Principal.

The Lady Principal went on talking. She told Virginia all about a dear little girl at her home. Virginia listened so hard that she did not see the children looking at her, and nudging each other in amazement. Nor did she see Carter, when the Lady Principal saw the faces he was making, slide down in his seat and stay there until the conductor called "Lloydsborough Valley!"

"We get off here," said Miss Ellison.

Virginia took up her little picnic-basket, and slipped her hand into that of the Lady Principal. Her mamma carried a big basket. In it was a fine chocolate cake.

"Miss Mason's nice, mamma," Virginia told Mrs. Barton as they walked together through the shady lane leading to the mill.

"Yes," said her mamma; "I like her very much, and admire her more than I can say. She has a tender heart, and has done a great deal of good to many people."

By and by, just as Virginia had decided that she could walk no farther, they reached the old mill. It was in so lovely a spot, that all the mothers cried, —

"How beautiful! We had no idea that there was such scenery in our neighborhood."

The mill was in ruins. Only its walls were left standing on the edge of a lovely clear stream, which rippled over a rocky bed between high banks. On these banks were lovely beech trees and huge rocks, on which grew long

feathery ferns and a flower which Miss Ellison said was columbine.

When the baskets were deposited under a tree selected by the ladies, the children scattered in all directions. A few of the boys went to work making a fire in an oven which they built of stones. Carter and Harry went to a farmhouse over the hill to try to get some milk for Miss Ellison. Billy and Virginia went with Miss Ellison to some large rocks to gather ferns and columbine.

"Gather the prettiest ferns you can find," said Miss Ellison. "We want them to decorate the table."

When she had gathered as many as she wanted, she left the children and returned to the ladies.

Virginia and Billy went on up the stream, jumping from stone to stone where the water was shallow, scrambling up to the bank where it was deep. By and by they reached the other children.

Jessie was standing on a large rock in the middle of the stream. She was a "colored" preacher, preaching a sermon to her congregation on the bank. She could talk just like a colored person, so the children were having a fine time listening. Presently there came a call. It was Miss Ellison's voice, so the "I Can School" hurried back to the ladies.

"It is time to crown the King and Queen," said Miss Ellison.

In her hand were two lovely golden crowns. They were made of pasteboard, and covered with gilt paper.

"Come, children," she said, "here under this tree."

The lady who wrote books had been making up a song for them to sing. In a few moments she taught them the words and tune. It was all about Maypoles and kings and queens. When they all knew the song, Miss Ellison called Harry and Elizabeth. She whispered something in their ears. They left the rest, and ran to a great rock towards the top of the bank. They climbed up and stood on the top. The mothers and children gathered on the grass before the rock. The children began the song, and Frances appeared on the rock behind Harry and Elizabeth. In her hands were the crowns.

"I crown you, Elizabeth, Queen of the May," she said. "I crown you, Harry, King of the May."

The children went on singing while they formed into couples, and marched to the Maypole. The King and Queen sat on their rocky throne and watched their subjects.

They could not dance for fear that their crowns would fall off.

"One must suffer to be royal, you know," said the Lady Principal to Virginia. Virginia, however, felt sure she would be willing to sit on the rock for the glory of wearing the crown.

The ladies had had much trouble in fixing the pole. From its top hung long streamers of colored cambric. Each child took one of the streamers. The lady who wrote the books and two of the mammas played tunes on combs covered with paper, and the children danced and twisted themselves around the pole. It would be nice to be able to say that they did it gracefully; but, alas, they did not. The ladies with the combs mixed their tunes with laughter, and the pole wobbled so that Miss Ellison thought it wise to say:

“If their majesties, the King and Queen, will be graciously pleased to descend from the royal throne, their loyal subjects will follow them to the feast.”

The King and Queen took their places at the head of the line, and the “I Can School” followed, two by two. The ladies brought up the rear.

The feast was certainly fit to set before a king, and before a queen as well.

The long tablecloth was stretched on the grass, under a great beech. All around its edge was a beautiful border of fern leaves. In the center was a large iced cake. It was decorated in pink, and had the date on it.

About it was a circle of fern leaves, arranged like rays from a sun.

“Ada made it,” said Miss Ellison. “Isn’t it a lovely cake? She did it all herself.”

The King and Queen had places at the head.

Their subjects sat on the sides. The ladies waited on them, and ate their share later.

Everything tasted so good that the "I Can School" entirely overate itself.

The ladies had made chocolate, so every child had some in a cup and saucer.

The King and Queen suffered so much from the weight of their crowns that Miss Ellison asked permission of the subjects to permit her to remove them.

"My!" said Carter, "this picnic's good! I've ate chicken, and four sandwiches, and ham, and two stuffed eggs, and cheese, and pickles, and one of them old olives, and every kind of cake, and some candy, and stuffed dates, and beaten biscuit, and chocolate."

"Oh, Carter!" said his mother, blushing, when all the ladies laughed.

"I was hungry, mamma," said Carter.

After dinner they played games, and had a ramble along the creek. Nobody wanted to go home, but it had to be done. At four-thirty they started for the train.

"I hate to go home, mamma," said Virginia.

"But we must," said the Lady Principal, in her chapel voice. Virginia felt that she did not like her as well as she had when she was telling her stories on the train.

They reached Fairview just in time for Virginia and her mamma to drive home with Mr. Barton.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" she cried.

Miss Ellison waved her hand at her, and the picnic was over.

"Papa," said Virginia, "it was the very nicest picnic I ever went to in all my life."

"And was the Queen as nice a one as you would have been?" inquired her papa.

"Nicer," said Virginia. "'Cause my head wouldn't have filled the crown. I tried it on, and it came down over my nose. Papa, there's only one more thing we can have now in the 'I Can School.' Guess what it is, won't you, Papa?"

"Lessons?" inquired Mr. Barton solemnly. "They are the one thing I hear nothing about."

Virginia looked a trifle uncomfortable.

"Yes, papa, lessons. We always have lessons. It's something else, lots nicer. It's vacation, papa; and it begins June the fifth. Miss Ellison says so."

CHAPTER X.

JUNE.

CERTAINLY the "I Can School" did do a great amount in June. On the first day Miss Ellison distributed all the written and painted work which the children had done during the entire year. She had kept it in neat piles in the big drawers of the sand table. She also brought out the drawing-books, and the copy-books, and the clay modeling, and the exercises in numbers which had been written once a month.

The children spread their work on their desks, and discovered how much better things were done at the end of the year than at the beginning. They then helped Miss Ellison arrange the work about the room, on the walls, and on the table. Every child had a certain space. First Miss Ellison tacked up the earliest work, then that done during the year, and then the very latest.

The modeling, and maps, and copy-books, and drawing-books were arranged on the table. Virginia's space was near a window. She stood a long time before her work, and studied it. First she looked at the badly printed cat marked

September, and then at the vertical writing of June. It made her feel very proud to see how much she had improved.

"Your mammas will all come and see our exhibition after the Commencement exercises," said Miss Ellison.

The closing exercises of the Fairview Academy began on Sunday, with what the Principal called the Baccalaureate sermon. Virginia thought Baccalaureate a very pretty word, and so she asked her mamma to take her to hear the sermon.

In the pews in front of her sat the boarding pupils. They looked very fine in new white dresses, and summer hats trimmed in flowers.

Virginia liked their looks very much, and she liked the hymns.

"But I don't like Bacca — you know, papa; yes, — laret sermons. They're too long."

On Monday came the school reception.

Virginia felt very important over this. Her mother often went to receptions, and now she was to go to one.

"Catherine and Lucretia wanted to go, mamma," she confided to Mrs. Barton. "I would take them, 'cause the invitation says 'and family'; but I don't believe Carter would treat them politely."

Mrs. Barton thought it very likely that he would not. "Such young children" she told Virginia, "are much better off at home. Excitement is bad for their nerves."

Virginia felt very fine, for she wore a new dress of white organdy and lace. The class color was blue, so Mrs. Barton had tied her hair with a ribbon of that shade.

The school parlors were so grand that Virginia would not have known them had it not been that the "I Can School" had helped Miss Ellison decorate them.

In the morning they had all driven to the daisy fields, and had gathered great bunches of flowers. When they returned, Miss Ellison sent them to the school garden for all the asparagus tops they could find.

With these, Miss Ellison and the large girls had decorated the rooms.

Virginia, not knowing what a little girl should do at a reception, peeped in at the parlor doors.

The graduates wore lovely blue dresses of organdy. Each carried bouquets of white flowers. They stood near the door with the Lady Principal, and shook hands with the visitors.

Miss Ellison told the children that they, too, must go up and shake hands.

Virginia thought it a terrible thing but Miss Ellison went with them and it soon was over.

Then they went back to the hall, and stood around, not knowing what to do.

Virginia did not see why her mamma liked to go to receptions. They seemed very dull things to her.

Just as she had come to this depressing conclusion Miss Ellison appeared.

"You children must have some frappé," she said; and she led them to the back parlor where a great bowl stood on a table.

The frappé tasted good, and Virginia felt that receptions were better than she at first had thought.

Then Miss Ellison suggested that, as they were children, they should go to the lawn and play games.

"I'm mighty glad," said Carter; "if I could take off my collar, too, I'd like it better."

But this Miss Ellison could not permit.

"This is a reception where people wear their best," she said.

On the lawn they had a lovely time. They played "Drop the Handkerchief," "Pussy Wants a Corner," and "Open the Gates as High as the Sky."

Then, just before time to go home, they returned to the hall. There the big girls, who were acting as waiters, brought them cake and cream.

"I like receptions," said Virginia.

"I like ice-cream," said Carter, beginning on his second saucer.

Then came the Commencement. Again the "I Can School" was dressed in white. As the daisy was the class flower, every little boy wore one in his button-hole, and every little girl carried a bunch.

The procession formed in the yard. At its head walked Elizabeth and Harry.

Behind them came Virginia and Carter. Then followed Billy and Alex, and the other children according to their size. At the end of the long procession came the graduates in white, carrying immense bunches of daisies tied with white satin ribbon bows.

They marched across the yard to the hall, pausing at the door to catch step with the music inside.

"How sweet! How cute!" said the ladies, as the children, looking very important and pretty in their white clothes, marched down the central aisle two and two, divided, and went singly across the front, turned up the side aisles to meet in the rear, and returned in double line to the seats they were to occupy.

Virginia wished she was a graduate. Everyone seemed to think it a very grand thing to be one.

When all were seated the exercises began.

When the graduates came forward, and received rolls of paper tied with ribbon, everyone clapped their hands, Virginia did not know why they did it, but she clapped too.

The graduates blushed, bowed, and then sat down.

Just then Miss Ellison beckoned to Virginia and Billy.

"You two are to take up the flowers," she said.

Then she handed each of them a basket of roses, and told them which of the graduates to give them to.

At first Virginia felt dreadfully frightened. Her knees shook, and she felt cold all over. But she followed Billy, and soon got over her fright. Again she thought it must be nice to be a graduate, for they received presents, as well as loads of lovely flowers.

At last it was all over. The people left the hall, and the boarding girls and graduates hurried to their rooms to change their dresses and pack their trunks.

All the mammas of the "I Can School" children went with Miss Ellison to the school-room to see the work.

"It is wonderful!"

"They have done splendidly!"

"How can you have so much patience?"

The ladies did all the talking, and the children listened.

When the mothers had seen everything Miss Ellison told the children that they could come and get their things the next day from the janitor.

"Yes, I am going this afternoon," she said to the mammas. "I am pretty tired, but I am anxious to get home."

The children were so excited that some of them forgot to say good-bye to their teacher. This seems a strange thing, but it often happens.

Virginia, standing by, saw Miss Ellison's eyes fill with tears. She could not understand what was the matter; for she was a little girl, and could not know that Miss Ellison was very tired from all the work, and that it hurt her to think that the children for whom she had tried to do so much could forget her in a moment. She had worked so hard to try to make them enjoy the year. Virginia did not know what was the matter, but she felt that her dear Miss Ellison was in trouble.

"Good-bye, Miss Ellison," she said, putting up her little mouth to be kissed. "I'm sorry that it's the end of the 'I Can School.'"

Then Miss Ellison was all smiles.

"You sweet little thing," she said, which was exactly what she had done ten months before.

How long ago that seemed to Virginia. How stupid she had been about learning to spell that easy "cat."

Now she could read a whole page about a black cat which got into the nest of a white hen, and she could add numbers, and "write vertical." She had painted in a book, and modeled a lovely half-apple, made real by a stem and the seeds of a russet she had had for lunch one day. She knew the name of all the birds about Fairview, and she could tell about the wild flowers.

Altogether she felt very learned and scornful of a certain small person who had thought

Kentucky the name of a little girl, and who had known nothing of George Washington, and who had called C-A-T kitten-puss.

Virginia's mamma was very proud of all her little girl knew. She did not wait for Virginia to get her work from the janitor. She took it all carefully home to show her husband.

"Papa," said Virginia, the moment Mr. Barton entered the house that evening, "it's vacation!"

"Vacation!" said her father. "My! my! I remember that there was a time, Miss Barton, when I loved it better than school; do you?"

Virginia hesitated.

"Ten months," she said at last, "is a lot of school. Lucretia and Catherine seem just as tired, papa. Their lessons don't interest them now that it's so hot. I love the 'I Can School,' papa; but it's nice to stay at home and play 'Lady come to see.'"

This was a very long speech for Virginia, the longest that she ever had made.

Her papa laughed.

"Miss Barton," he said, "profound student that you are, I see that in some things you are not altogether different from your parent. But let me remind you, Miss Barton, when you feel at times a little tired of vacation, that the 'I Can' will begin again on the tenth of September."

"And Miss Ellison will be so glad to see me!" said Virginia confidently.

Her papa laughed.

“As for that, Miss Barton — ”

“Now don’t, Edward,” interrupted his wife. “I am sure, Virginia, that Miss Ellison will be glad to see you in the fall. If I were you I would write her a little letter in the vacation. I have her address.”

“And I’ll tell Billy and Carter and Harry and all the children, and we’ll all write so that she won’t forget us. And she’ll answer them, mamma, won’t she?”

“I think she will,” answered her mother. “It will be very nice for you to write to her.”

But her husband said in a low voice, “Poor Miss Ellison.”

“Good Miss Ellison, papa,” said Virginia. “She’s nice, and I love her.”

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